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**The Indian Nation  
in 1942**



# **The Indian Nation in 1942**

Editor  
**Gyanendra Pandey**

**Published for  
Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta  
by  
K P Bagchi & Company  
CALCUTTA                      NEW DELHI**

**K P Bagchi & Company**  
**286 B. B. Ganguli Street, Calcutta 700 012**  
**I-1698, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi 110 019**

**First Published 1988**

**Printed by Sri N.K. Mitter at The Indian Press Pvt. Ltd., 93A Lenin Sarani,  
Calcutta 700 013 and published by Susanta Ghosh, Registrar, Centre for Studies in  
Social Sciences, Calcutta, 10 Lake Terrace, Calcutta-700 029**

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# **INTRODUCTION : THE INDIAN NATION IN 1942\***

**GYANENDRA PANDEY**

Quit India, the moment of India's most massive anti-imperialist struggle, provides a good opportunity for us to examine the contours of the Indian nation as it had emerged on the eve of Partition and Independence. The intensity of the Quit India Movement of course had a good deal to do with War-time conditions. Its distribution too was determined by a number of contingent factors : the 'immediacy' of the War in different parts of the subcontinent, the Government's preparedness to put down any resistance that might interfere with War supplies, the sharp differences of opinion among nationalist leaders and parties about the stand to be adopted in the face of the national and international crisis of 1942. Thus it was not without consequence that Rajagopalachari among Congress leaders, and the Communist Party among committed anti-imperialist parties, openly opposed the Quit India Movement. The growth of an independent Muslim political leadership and a separate Muslim constituency contributed its own part in the general aloofness of the Muslims from the Quit India uprising.

The broad features of the movement are now fairly well known.<sup>1</sup> If I refer to them here, it is partly because an 'Introduction' to a collection of essays of this kind is expected to include something of a general survey. But there is another reason as well, which is that any investigation of the boundaries of a nation must indicate the limitations of the national movement, all the more so in a historiographical context where its strengths are more readily portrayed.

The strongest centres of Quit India lay in a wide arc across northern India, stretching from Bombay, Satara and Ahmedabad

\* An earlier draft of this essay was presented at seminars in the Universities of Tokyo and Oxford. I am grateful to the participants in those seminars, and also to David Arnold and Dipesh Chakraborty, for their response to the questions raised in it.

in the west, through U. P. and Bihar in the north, to Bengal and Orissa in the east. A variety of factors appears to have been responsible for the force of the anti-imperialist upsurge in these areas. The eastern and northern states lay pretty much in the direct line of the threatened Japanese advance and the all too evident (and pathetic) withdrawal of soldiers wounded in the war and migrant labourers and merchants ejected from their sources of livelihood in southeast Asia. Some of the storm centres of the revolt in these states—Banaras and Gorakhpur, parts of Bihar, the Medinipur district of southwest Bengal—were also the site of prolonged nationalist agitation in the preceding decades, or areas where the Kisan Sabhas and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP, which provided a good deal of the local leadership in the course of the 1942 uprising) had been especially active since the mid-1930s.<sup>2</sup>

The areas of western India that were to the fore in the Quit India Movement, while far removed from the zone of military activity, shared this tradition of a high level of nationalist activity. However, the agencies for this were different in different places. In Satara, a new generation of non-Brahman leaders had in the 1930s carried their non-Brahman peasant supporters into the Congress, and some of them had developed close links with the CSP.<sup>3</sup> Bombay had been a prominent centre of nationalist and of course labour agitation, inspired or guided by a variety of Liberal, Congress, CSP and Communist leaders. Ahmedabad, and Gujarat more generally, was a recognized stronghold of the Gandhian Congress since the close of the First World War.

Madras, which at one stage looked as though it might be in the frontline of the expected Japanese invasion of India, was relatively quiet during the Quit India Movement. This was due at least in part to factors that we have already noticed—the open opposition of the most important Congress leader of the south, C. Rajagopalachari.<sup>4</sup> In Kerala, it was perhaps due to the opposition (or, at least, diffidence) of the Communists. The Indian States, where the Congress had long been shy of establishing branches and nationalist activity had been for the most part ill-organized and fitful, were with one or two notable exceptions quiet. Punjab, which remained a most important military recruiting ground, and where neither the Congress nor the Kisan Sabhas had a strong base, was again 'backward' in nationalist terms; and the predominantly Muslim areas of north-western India by and large remained withdrawn.

1942 confirmed that there had been a significant Muslim drift away from the Congress. Of course, Muslims of many different classes and regions were still far from being committed to the Muslim League, but the political future appeared sufficiently uncertain for them to adopt a policy of general detachment and

caution. Even in the North-West Frontier Province, so prominent a centre of Civil Disobedience in the early 1930s, support for Quit India was at best lukewarm.<sup>5</sup> In other regions, where Gandhi's call to 'Do or Die' evoked a more enthusiastic response, Muslim aloofness was nevertheless marked and potentially dangerous from the nationalist point of view.<sup>6</sup>

There was another large section of Indian society, not nearly so 'united' or so well organized politically as the Muslims of the different provinces, which was evidently disturbed by the emerging balance of forces within the Congress. This was the 'community' (as it was increasingly coming to be described) of 'untouchables' or *dalits*. It was surely a statement of some moment when Ambedkar joined Jinnah in calling upon 'his' people to celebrate the resignation of the Congress ministries in October 1939 as a 'day of deliverance'.<sup>7</sup> At the grassroots level, *dalit* groups, like others among the classes of the poorer peasants and landless and menial labourers, appear to have been somewhat hesitant about joining the rich peasants and small landlords, and the students from a rural or urban petty-bourgeois background who provided the spearhead of the nationalist uprising in 1942.<sup>8</sup>

One may refer to some other areas of uncertainty as well, although in the absence of more detailed research it is difficult to speak of them with much confidence. One relates to the part played by industrial labour about which we know precious little even for the first phase of urban demonstrations and *hartals*. Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad and a few other industrial centres produced extraordinary political statements, in the form of labour strikes on the single issue of the formation of a national government and of millowner support for worker who went on strike.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, the picture is hazier. In Madras, according to David Arnold, it is not entirely clear whether the strikes in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in August-September 1942 were inspired by the Quit India Movement or only a new stage in an on-going worker-employer struggle.<sup>10</sup> In Bombay and Calcutta, we are told, industrial labour played very little part.<sup>11</sup> As with the militant coir workers of northern Kerala, this may have been due in part to the restraint counselled by influential communist (and, in Calcutta, Muslim League) leaders.

Another interesting feature of Quit India was that, even when, in its second phase, it had spread out from the bigger cities and towns into the countryside and assumed the form of a mass peasant uprising in some areas, it led to very few anti-landlord actions. This was in marked contrast to the pattern of events in the earlier campaigns of mass agitation against the British launched by

the Congress in 1920-2 and 1930-4. It has been attributed to the intensity of anti-British feeling in the unusual circumstances of 1942, which meant that all other contradictions were pushed into the background;<sup>12</sup> or, alternatively, to the fact that this was a period of some prosperity for the bulk of the peasantry who were in no mood, therefore, to launch into no-rent and no-revenue campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

It needs to be said that sections even of the richer peasantry did, after all, hurl themselves into an all-out anti-colonial campaign which, if defeated, was liable to entail severe losses for them. The absence of anti-landlord actions in 1942 may, in fact, have a simpler explanation, which is that the mass movement was not given the time nor the space in which to produce a second, more radical wave of revolt of the kind that has characterized many other peasant uprisings in India before and since.<sup>14</sup> Over the greater part of the country, the British Government's response was brutal, effective and quick. And in most places where it survived, Quit India was transformed, in its final phase, into a hit-and-run guerilla campaign which lasted for many months and even years in some regions, with the emphasis on sabotage and individual punishment rather than on efforts to mobilize support for mass resistance.

No national movement can expect to gain the active support of the whole body of the 'nation' over the entire geographical area of its claimed territory; or to be wholly free from inner tensions and divisions. In the brief sketch of the geographical and social extent of the Quit India Movement presented above, I have done no more than survey the boundaries of the emerging Indian nation in the most obvious way. There are, however, other ways in which this enquiry may be pursued. One is to examine the class character of the aspirant ruling class, which Gail Omvedt explicitly and some others implicitly do in this volume. Another, which the rest of this chapter will be devoted to, is to investigate the relationship between proclaimed 'citizens' and potential power-holders in the future nation-state, which may also be conceived of as the relationship between leaders and followers in the national movement. Here the evidence from Quit India is very striking indeed.

With all the variations between one region and another and the undoubted importance of many exceptional factors associated with the Second World War, two tendencies related to our subject stand out from the experience of the Quit India Movement. One was the general acceptance of Gandhi as the leader of the projected 'final struggle' against the British, the person with the exclusive right to determine the timing and scope of the

movement. The other was the assumption of leadership once the struggle began by men and women who were far from being Gandhian in their outlook and approach, and even by many who had little to do with the Congress organization in the past. This development, it needs to be said straightaway, was not a product solely of the fact that the bulk of the recognized Congress leadership at the national and provincial levels was arrested in one sweep on the morning of 9 August 1942.

Quit India might be fairly summed up as a popular nationalist upsurge that occurred in the name of Gandhi but went substantially beyond any confines that Gandhi may have envisaged for the movement. In this respect it revealed tensions that prevailed widely even in the earlier nationalist campaigns of Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience. But 1942 showed them up in starker relief. Gandhi as the undisputed leader of a movement over which he had little command. This paradox has a good deal to tell us about the relationship between the Congress and the people in the final years of anti-colonial struggle against the British. It also helps to explain the remarkable ambivalence displayed by the Congress leadership in its response to Quit India in the months and years after August 1942.

Let us begin by examining the above proposition regarding Gandhi's virtually unchallenged position as the leader of the nation in 1942. Jayaprakash Narayan spoke for a large section of 'advanced' opinion in the country when he wrote in 1940, 'If a national struggle as opposed to sectional, factional or partial (struggles) can be launched by Mahatma Gandhi alone, it is suicidal to fight him. It is necessary to lend him our fullest cooperation and loyalty in everything that is preparatory for struggle.'<sup>15</sup> The feelings of ordinary folk, and of the British rulers of India, were well reflected in the air of expectancy and the considerable speculation that arose in the months before August 1942 as to 'Gandhi's next move'. To quote two reports from the Governor of U.P. in May and June 1942, 'It is hardly profitable to speculate about Gandhi's next move, though of course there are numerous rumours'; and 'nearly every district has reported rumours, but it is not much use speculating what his final decision will be.'<sup>16</sup>

It is perhaps worth our while speculating a little on how this situation had come about, where Gandhi was recognized all around as the only one who could launch the struggle on behalf of the people. The simple explanation, that this was inevitable given the nature of the principal contradiction of the times—between nationalism and imperialism, is plainly inadequate. For the question remains why this particular vehicle was chosen for the

expression of that anti-imperialist sentiment? The answer to this question has much to do with the history of the Congress and the forms of nationalist agitation in the 1920s and 1930s.

Gandhi had after all been the undisputed leader of all the earlier countrywide campaigns of nationalist protest against the British, in 1919, 1920-2 and 1930-4. The Non-co-operation Movement of 1920-2, which marked the transformation of Indian nationalism from an elitist into a popular or mass phenomenon, was mainly his idea. The technique of non-violent resistance or *satyagraha*, so widely adopted after 1920, of *civil* disobedience of 'unjust' laws and controlled agitation over specific issues, was his particular contribution. And if the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 was to a large extent thrust upon Gandhi and other senior leaders of the Congress, the Mahatma was still reckoned to be the one person who could lead the agitation: It was left to him to initiate the campaign at a time and on an issue of his choosing.

What we speak of today as the Quit India Movement was projected initially as the mass Civil Disobedience movement of 1942, with an emphasis on the 'mass' aspect to underline the change in circumstances from 1941 when the Congress had launched its strictly controlled and limited campaign of Individual Civil Disobedience. It is not without interest to note that the campaigns of 1941-42 are represented in nationalist historiography as the 'third great wave' of struggle against the British. It certainly looked like that to many observers in the early 1940s. From the writings of Gandhi on the one side to the reports of the Viceroy on the other, the surviving records from 1942 do suggest the anticipation of a movement which would be in line with those that had gone before, if rather more militant.<sup>17</sup>

As before, the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) left it to Gandhi to determine the 'steps to be taken' and to launch the movement at the appropriate time. Gandhi in his speech to the AICC after the adoption of the Quit India resolution on 8th August 1942 said: 'The actual struggle does not commence this moment. You have only placed all your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand. That process is likely to take two or three weeks.' He went on in the same speech to advise different sections of the society (Government servants, students, and others) as to what they should do in the period of waiting 'till the time that I frame a programme for the struggle'.<sup>18</sup>

Behind Gandhi stood the organizational strength and prestige of the Congress. Gandhi had himself been instrumental in giving the organization a new vitality through the new Congress constitution

of 1920 and the reorganization of the Provincial Congress Committees on linguistic lines. He had also been the first to underline the fact that the Congress, if it was to be a truly national party, must move out into the villages and become the party of the peasantry. Along with this, the sustained constructive work of the decades before the Second World War—extending from flood relief to the promotion of spinning and the *achhutodddhar* programme—and the enthusiasm generated by the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements, had given the Congress a unique position in the country and indeed all over the colonized world. In Ahmedabad, Gillion suggests,<sup>19</sup> moral authority had passed from the Government to the Congress as long ago as 1919 on account of its activities. Much the same thing was to happen in many other parts of the country, in 1919 and afterwards.

Congress, or Swarajist, participation in the provincial and national elections and the legislative councils of the 1920s and '30s had given the organization added strength. By the early 1940s, moreover, the Congress had come to be commonly perceived as the party most likely to succeed to power when the British finally left India—'the party of Government', as it came to be called. Its exceptionally good performance in the provincial elections of 1937, the formation of Congress ministries in seven out of eleven provinces, the actions taken by those ministries to show that the era of authoritarian British rule was over (however short-lived or nominal some of these proved in the end to be) and the constitutional discussions between Congress leaders and high-level representatives of the British Government to decide the political future of India, had all contributed to this result.

Along with these sources of Congress strength, one may refer to the 'weakness' of the other political elements in the country that were concerned with the mobilization of mass political support. Apart from the Muslim League, and to some extent the Hindu Mahasabha, most of the important political groupings in the country seem to have acknowledged the primacy of the Congress. This might appear unlikely in the case of the Communists. But we must remember the peculiar situation in which the Communist Party of India was placed. Relative newcomers on the political stage, committed at least theoretically to a politics based rather narrowly on the industrial working class, their ranks were further decimated by heavy state repression in the late 1920s. In the 1930s the 'united front' strategy of the Communists brought them into a position of working alongside the Congress. At this time they worked through a number of front organizations, including major



bodies like the CSP and the Kisan Sabhas which openly conceded leadership to the Congress as the national party. The 'People's War' line adopted at the end of 1941, to the extent that it was accepted by Communist activists in different parts of India, was to place them at loggerheads with the Congress once again. This new line would earn them some kind of reprieve from the Government of India, but also much unpopularity among large sections of their politically-conscious countrymen and women.

The CSP, which had quickly become a party with considerable influence in scattered parts of the country, saw itself—as its name indicates—very much as a part of the Congress, and the party leadership continued to acknowledge the ultimate authority of Gandhi throughout 1942 and 1943. In an essay entitled 'Gandhiji's Leadership and the Congress Socialist Party', Jayaprakash Narayan stated the position unambiguously : 'The Congress alone is the country's salvation.'<sup>20</sup> In his letters 'To all Fighters for Freedom' written from the underground ('somewhere in India') and printed by the Sind Congress Socialist Group in December 1942 and September 1943, he reiterated this position : 'In August last ... Congress stood in all its power at the head of the people' ; 'Truly was the 'Open Rebellion' envisaged by our incomparable leader, Mahatma Gandhi'.<sup>21</sup>

The All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) which became another important political platform in the 1930s, was a purely sectional movement with no pretensions to becoming the central organization of the national movement. A division appeared within its ranks in 1942 more or less along the lines of a wing that leaned towards the Communists and another that favoured the CSP. We may expect that the two wings followed these different inclinations in their response to Quit India, though again with the proviso that formal party positions and actual local behaviour frequently differed. In any case, even those AIKS leaders who opposed the Congress leadership in the later 1930s and again on the issue of a mass civil disobedience movement in 1942, recognized that the Congress had a special authority and legitimacy.

Thus during the 1937 election campaign in Bihar, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, taunted for canvassing on behalf of *zamindars* seeking election to the provincial legislature when he had only a little while earlier bitterly opposed their adoption as Congress candidates, argued that it was a question of loyalty to the Congress, to which all other organizations were subordinate.<sup>22</sup> The pairing of 'the Congress' and 'the nation' remained a common feature of Kisan Sabha resolutions during 1942 and 1943—at the very time when it was alleged that Communists had established an

excessive domination over the AIKS<sup>23</sup>—as in the condemnation of acts of sabotage and 'goondaism' (in Quit India) which brought shame upon the 'fair name of our National Congress and our country', or the declaration that the British Government would never be able to crush 'the Congress and the Indian people.'<sup>24</sup>

Yet, if what has been said in the preceding paragraphs expresses one truth at the level of organized politics, there are other truths that still require investigation. The history of Indian society, as Partha Chatterjee has recently written,<sup>25</sup> will have to be the articulation of many histories if it is to comprehend the totality of social and political developments. The foregoing pages will already have indicated the frequent gap between organized party politics and the rather differently organized sphere of popular political action. While the formal Communist Party position in 1942 was in support of British war efforts, for example, many party members supported and even took a leading role in the Quit India movement in different parts of country. Consider only the U.P. Government's observation, 'Muslims except possibly Communists have taken no part and appear anxious to continue studies.'<sup>26</sup>

A similar breaking of ranks occurred in the influential Krishak Sabha of Medinipur district, which Hitesranjan Sanyal writes about in this volume. The Sabha, like its parent body the AIKS, was opposed to the Quit India movement. But the majority of its cadre in the district could not escape the general mood of militancy. At a meeting of Krishak Sabha activists especially convened to hear the views of both pro- and anti-Quit India leaders, the majority of those assembled decided to discard the official policy of the Sabha and join the movement.<sup>27</sup>

From Medinipur in 1942, again, we obtain illustration of how local Congress politics was sometimes far in advance of the party's official position. In the eastern part of the district, local workers launched a mass *satyagraha* against the Government's drive to procure rice and paddy, long before the All India Congress Committee met in Bombay to pass the Quit India resolution. Congress workers and villagers seized procurement boats, offered *satyagraha* on the roads along which procurement carts passed, and many of them were arrested under the Defence of India rules.<sup>28</sup>

What all this suggests is that if there was a widespread acceptance of the primacy of the Congress at one level, there were at the same time autonomous forces at work on another level that repeatedly challenged the notion of a necessary Congress 'leadership'. These forces had their roots in the far from complete integration of the Indian economy, in the significant cultural

divide between the elites and the masses, and not least in long-standing traditions of militant resistance to class and state oppression in one region and another. Developments in the 1930s had strengthened these traditions of local politics in many areas. Indeed, one could argue that if the 1920s was the decade of the ascendancy of the Congress, the 1930s saw that ascendancy challenged in numerous ways—by the emergence of several new political forces and the resurgence of some older ones, so that the anti-imperialist struggle once again came to exhibit a rather more different appearance.

The revival of the strength of the Muslim League, and the growing importance of other 'communalist' forces, was only the most obvious reflection of the changing situation. The establishment of the CSP and the AIKS were powerful indicators of the new trends in mass politics. And there were others too. In Kheda district, Gujarat, to take a different kind of illustration, the subordinate peasantry which had been sympathetic to the Congress movement in the 1920s and early 1930s, had since turned hostile to the Congress. Here, David Hardiman reports, a meeting of some 10,000 Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas in August 1942 resolved that they would give no support to the Quit India movement. In the Shahabaddistrict of Bihar, likewise, the Triveni Sangh, representing the interests of the 'backward' cultivating castes—the Koeris, the Kurmis and the Ahirs—declared its support for the war efforts of the Government of India.<sup>29</sup>

In some instances popular forces such as these, awakened to a new consciousness of their organized strength, found representation even within the regular Congress party. One of the more striking examples of this has already been mentioned: the Satara district in Maharashtra where the Congress was taken over by young non-Brahman leaders in the 1930s. These men, inspired by and trained in the militant non-Brahman movement of the region, now drew large sections of the *bahujan samaj* into orthodox nationalist politics. Gail Omvedt makes the point that the Satara peasantry came into the nationalist movement at this time having few organizational links with either the Congress or the 'Left'.<sup>30</sup> In this region, the non-Brahman Satyashodhak movement provided the base and the main striking force of the Quit India upsurge. Nevertheless, Gandhi was by now evidently an important symbol for the entire range of nationalists in Satara, and their response to his call to 'do or die' produced the *prati sarkar*—perhaps the most powerful and long-lasting of the parallel governments established during the Quit India movement.

Over most of the country, the younger and more militant

nationalists found conditions congenial to their mood in the CSP, the Kisan Sabhas and other radical organizations. Not only did these bodies succeed in raising the land question, for instance, to the level of a national debate, in drawing the Congress leadership on the question of the precise social and economic content of *swaraj*, and thereby in reviving the danger of a split between Left and Right in the Congress. The CSP also won a number of dramatic victories in Congress organizational elections at the local level. In Kerala, again, it was the more radical elements of the CSP who converted the Congress into a mass organization in the mid-1930s and went on to lay the organizational base for the powerful Communist movement of the region.<sup>31</sup>

Such developments were indicative of a fairly general trend. It is not surprising to find that young men and women associated with the CSP and other radical organizations took such a prominent part in the Quit India Movement. Even in the Gandhian stronghold of Ahmedabad, where almost the entire population—minus the Muslims—was behind the Congress, and millowners gave financial assistance to the workers to enable them to prolong their strike in support of Quit India, it was a young Congress Socialist called Jayanti Thakor who became the *Shahersuba* and assumed leadership of the movement.<sup>32</sup>

In Medinipur district, with its own notable tradition of Congress-led *satyagrahas* and dynamic Congress leadership at the local level, a number of the established Congress leaders held aloof from Quit India while others hesitated initially. In the circumstances the initiative passed to militant young students, many of whom, while they were without distinct party affiliations, had veered towards the Forward Bloc in the late 1930s. At that time, Sanyal tells us, some of the students 'even in the remote villages' of eastern Medinipur were inspired more by Subhas Chandra Bose than by Mahatma Gandhi, whom they believed to be guilty of compromising with the British and hence a 'Rightist', although it is necessary to add that these diverse groups came together again under the Congress umbrella before the Quit India Movement caught fire in Medinipur.<sup>33</sup>

The question of the 'taking over' of the Congress, which we have referred to specially in the case of Satara, has another aspect which ought to be mentioned. This act of appropriation was one that occurred time and again at the level of grassroots action in the anti-imperialist struggle. The appropriation of nationalist symbols—whether 'Gandhi' or the 'Congress'—was the means by which the popular classes in different parts of the country repeatedly forced the pace of the movement and came to leave

their impress on Indian nationalism.<sup>34</sup> The process occurred in a great variety of situations—from the *kisan* movement in northern Allahabad and Awadh, to the Assam plantation workers' agitation, to the Gudem-Rampa rising led by Alluri Sitarama Raju in the early 1920s, for example—but it was never more evident than in 1942.

We need refer only to the widespread attacks on Government installations, police *thanas* and railway stations, and indeed the killing of police officials and stray British (or American) military personnel, all carried out in the name of Gandhi. In eastern U.P. and Bihar, there was long and serious contention between the so-called spirit of violence and that of non-violence—between those who believed in the capture of power, as it were, and those who still kept faith with *satyagraha* and the possibility of a peaceful succession. This was a contention that was very widely observed at the local level in 1942. And in many places, as some of those involved in the Quit India Movement in the Ghazipur district of U.P. recalled, the 'leadership' was Gandhi's but the spirit was that of Bhagat Singh.<sup>35</sup>

The tension between these contradictory tendencies was resolved in some places only with the open disowning of Gandhi. This is demonstrated most strikingly in the case of the legendary *prati sarkar* in Satara. Here the bulk of the activists refused to surrender even as late as August 1944, when the Quit India movement had more or less run its course and Mahatma Gandhi expressed his desire that those who were still underground should surrender: the *mantra* of 'do or die', they declared, took precedence over Gandhi's later wishes.<sup>36</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the acknowledged leaders of the underground movement from the end of 1942, had said the same thing somewhat earlier: 'We have declared ourselves independent, and also named the British as an aggressive power; we are, therefore, justified within the terms of the Bombay resolution itself to fight Britain with arms. If this does not accord with Gandhi's principles, that is not my fault.'<sup>37</sup> Let it be noted that this statement came after the massive and frequently violent rebellion that had occurred in his native Bihar, in U.P. and Bengal and several other parts of the country, and Jayaprakash's own dramatic escape from Hazaribagh jail in November 1942. It was another instance of the pace being forced, and an indication of the different centres of political initiative that had emerged out of the preceding decades of militant nationalist activity.

It is in this context that we must place the equivocal response of the Congress leadership to the Quit India movement which they were and to a large extent still are presumed to have conceived and directed. The leaders sought on the one hand to claim the revolt as their own and thereby to appropriate the credit that flowed from it, an effort that was especially noticeable in the run up to the elections of 1946 and 1952. There was at the same time, however, an attempt to distance the Congress from the 'excesses' of the movement and a plea—sometimes a warning—to the people not to repeat these.

A resolution adopted by the Congress working committee meeting in Pune on 14 September 1945 gives the substance of the Congress position in 1945. It congratulated the nation for 'the courage and endurance with which it withstood the fierce and violent onslaught of the British power' and expressed deep sympathy with all those who had suffered, 'during these three years [1942-45] of military, police and ordinance rule.' The committee went on to register its sorrow at the fact that

in some place the people forgot and fell away from the Congress method of peaceful and non-violent action, but realizes that the provocative action of the Government in effecting sudden and widespread arrests of all well-known leaders, and brutal and ruthless repression of peaceful demonstrations, goaded them to rise spontaneously to resist the armed might of an alien Imperialist Power which was trying to crush the spirit of freedom and the passionate desire of the Indian people to gain independence.<sup>38</sup>

The hesitation implied in this Congress ratification of the rising of 1942 was stated more plainly at other times. Mahatma Gandhi's concern over an outbreak of violence on this scale was to be expected. Writing to the Viceroy from jail in late September 1942, he described the events of August and September as a 'calamity' and declared that the people had gone 'wild with rage to the point of losing self-control'.<sup>39</sup> While it is possible to argue that this was only Gandhi's attempt at explaining away the violence that had occurred and justifying the position of the Congress, we would do well to pay attention to his language.

Similar language issued from other Congress sources who were not writing for the benefit of the colonial regime or in the heat of the moment. In his *Discovery of India* (1946), Jawaharlal Nehru wrote of the 'impromptu frenzy of the mob',<sup>40</sup> Pattabhi Sitar-amayya in the second volume of his *History of the Indian National*

Congress published in 1947, of how 'people grew insensate and were maddened with fury'.<sup>41</sup>

'Wild with rage', 'maddened with fury', 'frenzied' and 'insensate': it is a collection that competes with any colonial lament over an uprising among the Indian peasantry. The colonial regime and its representatives had argued many times that the honest but 'primitive' peoples of the tribal belts, or the 'simple', illiterate folk of the depressed cultivating and labouring classes, had been maliciously, foolishly misled. The reaction of the Congress leadership after Quit India betrayed a parallel perception. Thus in numerous speeches and writings, Nehru referred to the Quit India Movement as the greatest event in India since the Mutiny but lamented also that 'the people forgot the lessons of non-violence which had been dinned into their ears for more than twenty years'.<sup>42</sup> 'Lessons' which could apparently be imparted to the masses only by being 'dinned' into their ears. The distance between the leadership and their 'nation' was evident.

Some of the other implications of this distance were spelt out in statements made after the end of the War by a Congress leadership that had, so to speak, 'arrived'. Gandhi, one might add in parentheses, was fast becoming a mere father-figure of the Indian national movement, who needed to be honoured but not necessarily listened to.<sup>43</sup> So it is no longer 'non-violence' that appears as the critical issue in the statements of this ascendant leadership, but the question of 'discipline' and 'order' (though it is probably fair to say that even earlier, non-violence was in their eyes at least partly a weapon of political control). Addressing the Bihar Provincial Students Conference in 1945, Nehru praised the students of the province for their sterling part in the Quit India uprising, and then went on to say, 'I encourage you to have academic discussions on political matters, but warn you against taking the initiative in the political field. You must look for guidance from the accepted political party which is the Congress'.<sup>44</sup> The advice was in line with the Congress leader's instructions to the peasants of Awadh twenty-five years earlier to give up 'meetings' and 'disturbances' (*sic*) and leave it to Gandhi to win *swaraj*.<sup>45</sup>

In January 1947 Vallabhbhai Patel made the party high command's position clearer still when he wrote to Govind Ballabh Pant, Premier of U.P., about some pictures of police atrocities in 1942 which had been displayed in a Congress exhibition in Banaras. He was surprised, wrote Patel, that Pant, who had inaugurated the exhibition, should have been associated in any way with an exhibition in which such pictures were displayed.

The punishment of persons who were concerned with the 1942 atrocities is quite a different matter, and it is open to provincial Governments, if they so desire, to deal with official misdemeanour in that connection. But the caricaturing of official activities in the manner reported in the Press at a time when we are in office is open to serious objection. This is likely to affect the morale of the police force which in the present emergency can hardly be considered proper.<sup>46</sup>

This statement may be read as follows : 'The bureaucracy and the police were once again 'neutral'. The struggle for 'nation-building' was over. The task of controlling the 'nation' had begun. It betrays a perception of nationalism which was far different from that displayed by the mass of the people in the early 1920s, the early 1930s, and even in 1942 when the sole object of the uprising appeared to be to drive the British out of the country. For most ordinary Congress men and women, for students, workers and peasants, artisans and petty traders, nationalism had come to mean a society awakening, a people on the move—seeking more or less consciously to make their own history. That mood was not likely to evaporate in 1947 : the effects of these different perceptions of nation-building are still with us.

### Notes

1. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (New Delhi, 1983) provides the most useful summary, and the next few paragraphs follow his account closely. F. G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement* (Delhi, 1971) and A. C. Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement* (Delhi, 1975), among others, provide more detailed accounts. See also the useful collections of documents in N. Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power* Volume II, 'Quit India' (London, 1971) and P. N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Report* (Faridabad, 1976).
2. For an illustration of the importance of events since the mid-1930s, see Chandan Mitra's contribution in this volume, ch. 5 below.
3. See Gail Omvedt's contribution, ch. 8 below. In a similar way, the Orissa-Andhra *fituri* tradition fed into the nationalist movement from the 1920s; see Biswamoy Pati's contribution, ch. 6 below.
4. See David Arnold, ch. 7 below.
5. Nevertheless, as I have already said, this was no indication of commitment to an anti-Congress position: in the 1946 elections, the Congress again won a majority in the N.W.F.P.
6. See the examples of Medinipur, Ahmedabad and eastern U.P. in chs. 2, 3, 4 below.
7. Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 358.
8. Evidence for this statement is scattered through this volume, but is not unambiguous. For what may be 'exceptions', see the contributions of Sanyal, Hardiman, Pati and Omvedt.



9. Other examples include Dehri-on-Sone, referred to in ch. 4 below, and Coimbatore.
10. See ch. 7 below.
11. Govind Sahai, '42 *Rebellion* (Delhi, 1947), p. 89; Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 396-7.
12. This was one of the more contentious issues at the July 1983 seminar on the Quit India Movement held at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, where Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Barun De, among others, pointed to the effectiveness of decades of nationalist propaganda and the united 'umbrella' character of the national movement to account for the absence of open class conflict in 1942.
13. Cf. Hardiman, ch. 2 below; Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 403.
14. The exceptions in Satara and Medinipur, where no-rent campaigns and other kinds of anti-feudal actions developed, would appear to support this contention, for these were precisely the isolated areas where the Quit India Movement persisted longest.
15. J. P. Narayan, *Towards Struggle: Selected Manifestoes, Speeches and Writings* (Bombay, 1946), p. 141.
16. Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, Vol. II, pp. 157, 220.
17. On 13 August and even as late as 17 August, Linlithgow was still expecting a 'formal' inauguration of 'Civil Disobedience' by the Congress; *ibid*, pp. 683, 734. See also India Office Library, London, L/P & J/5/271, Hallett-Linlithgow, 18 August 1942; and National Archives of India, New Delhi, Government of India, Home Deptt., Political (Intelligence) File 3/16/42 & Kw, which is entitled 'Civil Disobedience Movement 1942, "Appreciation" Telegrams'.
18. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 76 (Ahmedabad, 1979), pp. 391, 395.
19. K. L. Gillion, 'Gujarat in 1919' in R. Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford, 1971), p. 143.
20. *Towards Struggle*, p. 139.
21. Reprinted in *ibid* (without complete dates).
22. Sahajanand Saraswati, *Mera Jivan Sangharsh* (Patna, 1952), p. 481, cited in K. Kumar, 'Congress-Peasant Relationship in the late 1930s' in D. N. Panigrahi, ed., *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1983).
23. Indulal Yagnik, President and Vice-President of the AIKS in 1942 and 1943, resigned on this ground in August 1943; M. A. Rasul, *A History of the All India Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta, 1974), p. 107.
24. *Ibid*. pp. 87, 101.
25. P. Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1984), p. xii.
26. L/P & J/5/271, D. O. No. F. 2/8/42 of 19 August 1942. For other evidence of Communist participation, see A. Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* (New Delhi, 1977), p. 275; A. Das, 'History in the Present Tense', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (October 1984), p. 61.
27. Ch. 3 below.
28. Ch. 3 below.
29. Ch. 2 and ch. 5 below.
30. Ch. 8 below.
31. Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 369.
32. Ch. 2 below.
33. Ch. 3 below.
34. See, for example, articles by David Arnold and G. Pandey in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi, 1982), and by Shahid Amin and Sumit Sarkar in *Subaltern Studies III* (Delhi, 1984).

35. See ch. 4 below.
36. See ch. 8 below.
37. J. P. Narayan, *Towards Struggle*.
38. Mansergh, ed., *Transfer of Power*, Vol. VI, pp. 274-5.
39. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 1002.
40. J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946, reprinted Bombay, 1969), p. 489.
41. P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Volume II (Bombay, 1947), p. 373.
42. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 487; Mansergh, *Transfer of Power*, Vol. VI, p. 60.
43. Cf. Partha Chatterjee's comments on the relationship between Gandhi, Nehru and the other senior Congress leaders in the 1940s in his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London, 1986).
44. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Volume 17 (New Delhi, 1983), p. 510.
45. S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography*, Volume I (London, 1975), p. 56.
46. Durga Das, ed., *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Volume 5 (Ahmedabad, 1975), p. 325. (I am indebted to David Arnold for this reference).



# THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN MEDINIPUR DISTRICT

HITESRANJAN SANYAL

## The Origins of the Quit India Movement

The Quit India Movement differed radically from the other movements launched by Gandhi. The Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements of 1920-22 and 1930-34 were conceived as campaigns of peaceful resistance to British rule in India. These movements were started as controlled volunteer movements. As they progressed, their social base expanded in order to accommodate wider popular participation. By contrast, Gandhi's writings and interviews in the first half of 1942 indicate his determination to initiate a massive uprising in order to compel the British to withdraw entirely from India.<sup>1</sup> The struggle was not conceived as a traditional *satyagraha*. It was to be a 'fight to the finish', an 'open rebellion', 'short and swift', which could very well plunge the country into a 'conflagration'. Foreign domination had to be ended whatever the cost. Gandhi was prepared to risk the occurrence of riots and civil war. The struggle would include every kind of mass action that came under the rubric of an 'unarmed revolt', including general strike, stoppage of the railways, disruption of communications and possibly interference with British troop movements. The traditional Congress methods such as courting imprisonment were considered 'too soft' for the occasion. Gandhi even conceded that the masses could take up arms in self-defence; armed resistance against a stronger and well-equipped aggressor was to be considered a non-violent act.<sup>2</sup> Above all, every individual was to consider himself free and act for himself.

This determination to launch a radically different kind of movement is confirmed by the speeches and writings of other Congress leaders.<sup>3</sup> The projected struggle, as it appears in the contemporary Congress sources, had four main features. First, it

was not to be non-violent in the traditional sense of the term : British rule in India had to be destroyed, if necessary by armed resistance. Secondly, anybody believing in complete independence of India could join it and every individual participant could choose his own method. Thirdly, students were urged to play a prominent part and assume the leadership of the movement, should senior Congress leaders be arrested. Finally, the movement was to include all possible forms of mass demonstration and was to be marked by total defiance of government authority, including interference with communications and railways, sabotage, interference with war efforts, incitement to strikes in industries, formulation of no-tax and no-rent campaigns, and efforts to alienate the police, the military and government servants as a whole from their allegiance.

Official enquiries into the Quit India Movement reveal that considerable preparations were made for launching the movement and a broad programme was also drawn up. The programme was quickly circulated in the different parts of the country between 9 and 11 August soon after the arrest of the Congress leaders.<sup>4</sup> This explains the uniformity in the course of the uprising in widely separated areas in spite of the absence from the scene of the important Congress leaders. The movement began in cities, but the focus soon shifted to rural areas. The people made determined efforts to destroy centres of administration, disrupt communications and dislocate the government's war efforts. There were attempts to capture the police stations, and destroy post offices, revenue and excise offices and other government buildings in the outlying areas. Breaches were made on the roads, telegraph posts were uprooted, telegraph and telephone wires were cut, railway tracks and signals were broken and station buildings were damaged and burnt. In several areas the civil administration collapsed owing to a great mass upsurge, and parallel governments were formed. Mass uprisings occurred in Assam, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.

The original twelve-point programme of movement is said to have been prepared by the Congress leaders under Gandhi's instructions or with his consent before 9 August.<sup>5</sup> It began with the call for a day-long *hartal* and incorporated all the methods of non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience which had been employed under Gandhi's leadership since 1920. But a note which was invariably added to the programme declared that the final stage of the movement would lead to the 'breaking of salt laws on a large scale, picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops,

promoting industrial strikes, holding up of railways and telegraphs, calling army to come out, non-payment of taxes, setting up of a parallel Government'.<sup>6</sup>

Several versions of this programme prepared by the Congress Socialist Party and the Khadi group, who combined to co-ordinate the movement throughout the country, appear to have gained wide currency.<sup>7</sup> These include the famous circular issued by the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee. These programmes laid stress upon militant activities such as destruction of telegraph and telephone lines, dislocation of the railways, disruption of government machinery, establishment of parallel government, stoppage of military supplies and organization of strikes in factories.

A comprehensive British intelligence report on the Quit India Movement prepared by T. Wickenden indicates that the Congress leaders had probably decided to work out the details of the programme after the All India Congress Committee (AICC) meeting in Bombay which ended on 8 August. The task of setting up organization for the specific purpose of conducting the movement was to be undertaken in the time that would elapse between the Bombay AICC meeting and the formal launching of the movement. But the arrest of the majority of the Congress leaders between 9 and 11 August deprived the Congress of the opportunity to conduct the movement systematically. Consequently the initiative passed into the hands of the lower-rank political workers, students and the common people. They took up the more extreme items in the programme and advocated drastic mass actions. However a central directorate for continuing the movement was set up after 9 August,<sup>8</sup> but it took considerable time for it to establish links with the autonomous developments in the different parts of the country.

In most places the movement tended to decline within two to four weeks, partly because of governmental repression through the army and the police, and partly because the leaders who were responsible for guiding the movement failed to consolidate the spirit of rebellion among the people. But the quick spread and intensity of the movement took the British Indian government completely unawares. The intelligence machinery of the government had failed to warn the authorities about the likely extent of the movement. Thus during the first two weeks of the uprising the authority of the government practically collapsed over vast tracts in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Kerala. A few weeks later similar developments occurred in Assam and in Medinipur district of Bengal. Linlithgow, who was then the Viceroy of India,

privately described the uprising on 31 August 'by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security'.<sup>9</sup>

The police force proved completely inadequate for dealing with the situation. It was only with the help of the army which was deployed in the different parts of India at that time as a part of the government's war preparations, that the government was able to re-establish its authority. The Quit India Movement certainly failed to end British rule in India, but it reflected on the one hand, the anger of the people and their capacity to strike a very severe blow at the government, and on the other hand, the limitations of the government's forces in handling such a situation. It became clear that the government would not be able to suppress another movement of this type with the help of the forces available to it.

The chronology of the events might have been different if Gandhi and other Congress leaders had remained free to lead the movement, but that would not have altered the character of the movement. For, as we have seen, the attitude of Gandhi and the other Congress leaders had undergone a great change.

The relation between the Congress and the government had begun to be strained from the beginning of the Second World War. The Congress resented the unilateral decision of the British Indian government to involve India in the War. In protest against this decision Congress ministries in seven provinces resigned. Officially the Congress refused to co-operate with the War efforts of the government unless the British agreed to form a national government at the Centre and to completely withdraw from India after the War.

Till the end of 1941 the War was a distant affair as far as India was concerned. But the situation changed dramatically once Japan joined the Axis powers in December 1941. Soon after joining the war, the Japanese conquered the British possessions of Malaya and Burma. The British forces failed to put up substantial resistance, in fact the British army completely collapsed and had to hurriedly withdraw, leaving their colonies at the mercy of the aggressors.

Before the war, the British might have thought of handing over substantial power to Indians. But the outbreak of the War brought a change of attitude, at least among the Conservatives. It was now intended to use India as the base for Allied strategy in South and Southeast Asia and her resources were used for War efforts as well as for post-War reconstruction. The British even contemplated using India as the base of British power in case Great Britain fell to the Germans.

After the Japanese conquest of Burma, both the government and the Congress were alarmed at the possibility of Japan attacking India. The British Indian government was naturally eager to secure Congress support in the War efforts. But Gandhi was determined to avoid turning India into a battlefield between Britain and Japan.<sup>10</sup> He was convinced that in the case of a Japanese attack on India the British would withdraw from this country as they had done in Malaya and Burma, leaving unprepared Indians to bear the brunt of the aggression.<sup>11</sup> He also feared that while facing Japanese aggression the British might follow a 'scorched earth' policy which would mean endless suffering for the people.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi firmly believed that only an independent India could effectively defend the country against the Japanese and against Fascism as a whole.<sup>13</sup> In March 1942 American troops began to arrive in India. This disturbed Gandhi, who felt that the presence of the American army on Indian soil was going to be a source of American influence on India.<sup>14</sup> Therefore he became anxious to end British rule before the War reached the shores of the country. He decided to proceed in every possible manner to prepare the ground for the 'supreme act' of getting the British to withdraw from India.<sup>15</sup>

There might have been other reasons why Gandhi was firmly set upon launching a movement in spite of obvious disadvantages. Gandhi appears to have been deeply perturbed by the passive acceptance by many Indians of British aggression and even a growing tendency to collaborate with British rule. Therefore he urgently needed to revive the spirit of resistance among his countrymen. Non-violence, he felt, could not be established without India's independence. Expressing his anguish, Gandhi wrote :

Of course the people must not on any account lean on the Japanese to get rid of the British power. That were a remedy worse than the disease. But as I have already said, in this struggle every risk has to be run in order to cure ourselves of the biggest disease—a disease which has sapped our manhood and almost made us feel as if we must for ever be slaves. It is an insufferable thing. The cost of the cure, I know, will be heavy. No price is too heavy to pay for the deliverance.<sup>16</sup>

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34 had eroded the moral authority of the ruling power and encouraged the people to assert their rights. One important result of this development was the growth of peasant militancy in many parts of India. But the



collapse of the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement had produced certain baneful effects on the nationalist politics of India. The common supporters of the Congress who had participated in the movement and suffered for it had moved away from the Congress and politically lost a sense of direction. A large section of the Congressmen had lost their faith in the efficacy of mass agitation as a means of dealing with the British. They began to look forward to a sharing of power under the ensuing constitutional reforms of the Government of India Act, 1935. Since 1921 Congressmen had been divided between the constitutionalist group and the mass constructive and political workers known as the Khadi group. The influence of the constitutionalists had waned considerably under the conditions of mass movement of 1930-34. But after 1934 they emerged as a formidable force, pleading for collaboration with the British. It was largely due to the desire for sharing power that the Congress participated in the elections to the provincial legislatures in 1937 and formed ministries in seven provinces. Congressmen were also allowed to participate in the local bodies, namely, the District, Local and Union Boards. In 1939 Gandhi compelled the Congress ministries to resign. But the constitutionalists including such prominent figures as C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Khare and K. M. Munshi were not reconciled to this position. They were eager to get back to power as soon as they could.

The War brought another split in the Congress. Several important Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad, then President of the Indian National Congress, considered it necessary to co-operate with the government in order to resist Fascism.<sup>17</sup> In early July 1940, the Working Committee of the Congress adopted a resolution which declared that the Congress would help the British by joining a 'National Government' which would have the confidence of the Congress. Gandhi condemned the resolution.<sup>18</sup> After Japan joined the War, some of the senior Congress leaders including Nehru and Rajagopalachari wanted to arrive at a political settlement with the British and were even inclined to participate in the government if a settlement could be arrived at.<sup>19</sup> These leaders exercised considerable influence with Congressmen at large. Like the constitutionalists, the majority of the Working Committee members were opposed to Gandhi's idea of launching a movement and some of them, such as Rajendra Prasad, were even prepared to desert Gandhi on this account.<sup>20</sup> Gandhi took a firm stand with regard to the opponents of the movement. He asked Azad to resign from the presidency of the Congress and wanted both Azad and Nehru to withdraw

from the Working Committee.<sup>21</sup> The rift in the Congress had come to such a pass that Gandhi, at one stage, even thought of launching the movement with the support of only the Khadi group which was closest to him.<sup>22</sup>

The communal tangle was another major problem facing the Congress at this time. The Muslim League policy of co-operation with the British government probably gave some advantage to Jinnah who was by now harping on the demand for Pakistan. Communal power politics had been gaining strength under the auspices of the British government since the early years of the twentieth century. After 1937 its pressure increased. For example, Herbert, Governor of Bengal informed Linlithgow, that the Muslim League, which was partner in the coalition government of Bengal, was using the office to heavily discriminate against the Hindus so that they would ultimately become impatient with the Congress for not having looked after their interest. The Governor also observed that the Hindu professionals and middle class resented the Congress's neutrality as regards the communal award and they had begun to support the Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>23</sup> During the War, a section of Congressmen headed by Rajagopalachari sought to solve the political tangle by conceding Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. The Americans, who had become concerned about the Indian situation, tried to push through the idea of forming a government that would include Nehru, Rajagopalachari and Jinnah.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, extremist tendencies within the Congress had begun to be consolidated under the Communist Party of India, the Congress Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc. This tended to create yet another split in the Congress ranks. Although the socialists formed a part of the Congress and the Communists remained within the organization, both of them radically differed from the official Congress economic and political programme. These parties had mobilized certain sections of the Congressmen and Congress sympathizers under their respective ideologies, and they wielded considerable influence with the youth, students, peasants and industrial workers in different parts of India.

The Forward Bloc founded by Subhashchandra Bose broke away from the Congress on the question of uncompromising struggle against British imperialism. Subhash Bose had escaped to Germany in 1941 to carry on the fight against the British with the help of the Axis power. Later, he went over to Japan and announced his intention of setting up a government of free India with Japanese military support. His clandestine escape from India and his efforts to fight the British with the help of their enemies

excited the imagination of many nationalists, particularly youth and students who mainly constituted the rank and file of the Forward Bloc. Subhash Bose's speeches broadcast from Germany proved to be particularly effective in expanding sympathy and support for his venture.

The impact of Subhash Bose's broadcasts and the news of his activities in Germany and Japan on nationalists in general, and Congressmen in particular, may have worried Gandhi. He vehemently opposed the Axis powers and strongly disapproved of Subhash Bose's efforts to take their help. In fact Gandhi observed that 'I believe that Subhash Bose will have to be resisted by us'.<sup>25</sup> The Forward Bloc had a considerable organization, especially in Bengal, built up mostly at the expense of the Congress. Even in such Congress strongholds as Medinipur district, a substantial section of the Congress leaders and workers had gone over to the Forward Bloc. The influence of Subhash Bose had increased even among the Congressmen of Medinipur who referred to him as 'the great redeemer'.<sup>26</sup> At the end of 1942, the rebellious Congressmen of Tamluk had established a parallel national government. It is said that one of the reasons for setting up the Tamluk national government was to get ready to help Subhash Bose in case he arrived in India with victorious forces.<sup>27</sup>

After much debate, Gandhi succeeded in converting his opponents in the Working Committee to the idea of an open rebellion and in gaining Congress support for his proposed movement.<sup>28</sup> Even so, he decided to spread the movement beyond the official limits of the Congress organization. He seemed to place his faith now on the spontaneous response of the people and their capacity to fight the evil of British domination on their own initiative. A new leadership would emerge from the ranks of the people. Gandhi insisted that every man should be prepared and willing to act on his own initiative and each individual should be his own guide and leader.<sup>29</sup>

Senior Congress leaders called upon students to take the initiative in the struggle and even to assume leadership in the absence of the recognized Congress leaders, and exhorted the peasants to respond to the call of the nation. The people were asked to defy government authority and to assert their independence in every possible manner.<sup>30</sup> Gandhi called upon all those who believed in complete independence of India to rise in an 'unarmed revolt' to 'fight to the finish' in an 'open rebellion'.

Clearly Gandhi was in a very militant mood: a militancy and a vehemence which were never apparent in the earlier phases of his long political career. Events from 9 August 1942 abundantly

proved that people in different parts of the country were also in a militant mood, seething with discontent and anger against the British Raj. This mood of desperate anger was articulated by the *Biplabi*, the spokesman of the Quit India Movement in Tamluk, in the following terms.

We are surprised at the limits of tolerance in our countrymen. Why do you quietly tolerate this oppression? Don't you think that it is far better to attack the posts of the enemy and to drive him away across the sea than to die slowly under the pressure of this oppression? How many persons might be killed by the bullets (of the enemy)? Don't you realize that a very much larger number of men is going to die in hunger?<sup>31</sup>

In another issue the *Biplabi* said that if peaceful means fail to produce any result then 'We are left with only one alternative. We shall destroy the British government by revolutionary means—in order to solve the food problem in independent India'.<sup>32</sup> There is something similar between the *Biplabi* article and the following words of Gandhi:

I waited and waited until the country should develop the non-violent strength necessary to throw off the foreign yoke. But my attitude has now undergone a change. I feel that I can not afford to wait, ... For the preparation that I have prayed and worked for may never come, and in the meantime I may be enveloped and overwhelmed by the flames that threaten all of us. That is why I have decided that even at certain risks which are obviously involved I must ask the people to resist slavery.<sup>33</sup>

The trend of militancy in the people may have followed from the experience of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Movement had trained the people in the technique of organized mass resistance. Militant resistance movements had begun to spread with the increasing pauperization of the peasantry under the impact of the Depression. They assumed an organized and extensive form after 1934.

The popular ministries which were established under the Government of India Act 1935 took some legislative measures to save the lower peasantry. But these measures failed to arrest the process of accumulation of land in the hands of the substantial farmers.<sup>34</sup> Almost all over the permanently settled areas the effective control of the rural situation passed into the hands of the

new force of the substantial farmers. In the broader field of politics, particularly in the context of the expansion of franchise, these powerful rural forces had come to be aligned with the important political parties including the Congress. Through the political parties as well as other contacts, the new rural forces exerted influence at the different levels of the administration.

With the growth of this new power in the rural areas, the impoverished peasantry was also being organized through the increasingly militant peasant agitations launched by the Kisan Sabhas related to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). In certain places, such as Medinipur and Arambagh, local Congress workers outside the CPI and the CSP were also doing the same work. These agitations generated considerable tension in the rural areas.<sup>35</sup> Brabourne, the Governor of Bengal, observed in 1938 that Congress propaganda among the peasantry constituted a 'real danger of serious trouble'.<sup>36</sup> In the course of the following years the tension heightened in different parts of Bengal. Jute prices were falling appreciably and profiteering was on the increase. No-rent campaigns were gathering momentum.<sup>37</sup> In several districts of Bengal the peasants had begun to loot markets.<sup>38</sup>

Initially the War had brought prosperity to certain sections of the peasantry. But the benefits enjoyed by the peasants were short-lived. The general price rise during the War soon began to hit all sections of the common people. But the worst sufferers were the peasants whose income had depleted due to the fall in the prices of jute and rice. In addition, the people were subjected to different kinds of repression and humiliation in connection with the War efforts. Subscriptions were collected for War funds and war bonds were sold, often by coercion.

Discontent developed into severe resentment when the Indian evacuees started arriving back from Malaya and Burma. After their defeat at the hands of the Japanese, the British authorities made all possible arrangements for removing the British population to safety and providing them with board and lodging. But the Indians in Malaya and Burma were mostly left to their fate. They were forced to leave their belongings and compelled to make their way through hostile territories. In many cases they covered long distances on foot before they arrived at the Indian border, often without food for days together. Many of them perished in the course of the long and hazardous journey.

Most of the Indian labourers in Malaya and Burma were recruited from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, and they brought with them stories of their misery, of the irresponsible manner in

which the Indians were abandoned by the British authorities and of racial discrimination in the treatment of the evacuees. These stories gave rise to very great resentment in eastern U.P. and Bihar,<sup>39</sup> but they were not without consequence in other areas through which the evacuees passed, including Assam and Bengal.

In Bengal, resentment against the government was aggravated by heavy procurement of paddy and rice by the Government implementation of a severe Denial Policy and the evacuation of villages for military purposes. Procurement of food grains to build up stocks for feeding the army was often accompanied by coercion, and grains were purchased at rates fixed by the government which were lower than those prevailing in the market. The procurement drive also created a sense of insecurity. It was widely felt that with the total stoppage of import of Burma rice, procurement of paddy and rice in Bengal would make the food situation precarious and deprive the people of the minimum means of subsistence.

Much more disastrous was the impact of the Denial Policy in the coastal areas. Fearing Japanese aggression along the coast of the Bay of Bengal the government adopted the policy of withdrawing all means of conveyance, motor lorries, buses, cycles and boats, from the coastal districts. To deprive the estuarial and the coastal people of the canoe is to deprive them of their life line. It almost completely disrupted the normal life of the estuarial and coastal areas. Trade almost ceased in these areas and they soon ran short of supplies of the essential commodities.<sup>40</sup>

As War came closer to India's border, increasing numbers of British, American and Australian troops began to arrive in the country. Troops were distributed over the different strategic points in the interior villages. The presence of the army in the countryside created several problems. The villagers had to face the highhandedness and brutality of the military personnel. But the situation worsened with the forced evacuation of villages for military purposes. A number of villages were evacuated for building army camps, aerodromes and other military establishments. But in many places, the angry reactions of the people led to open clashes with the military.<sup>41</sup>

The cumulative effect of all this was to create an explosive situation. Gandhi's writings in the *Harijan* between March and August 1942 show that he had been closely observing developments. Between April and June, he had indeed sent out some of his close followers to the different parts of the country in order to collect information on the actual state of things.<sup>42</sup> Apparently Gandhi made a careful assessment of the mood of the people, their

profound anger with the British government and their desire to strike hard at foreign rulers. The source of Gandhi's militancy may be traced to this. The political and military situation convinced Gandhi of the need for launching an extensive and militant movement immediately. The conditions in the country offered the opportunity to embark upon a final mass movement, a 'fight to the finish'.

Looking back, one can feel that by the middle of 1942 India had reached a critical position. The combination of events offered a rare opportunity of freeing the country from foreign domination. Gandhi felt that he could not afford to miss the opportunity, even if it meant a shift from the path of non-violence and even if the country was engulfed in civil war. 'I do not ask from you my own non-violence', Gandhi told a meeting on 5 August 1942. 'You have to decide what you can do in this struggle.'<sup>43</sup> Speaking on the Quit India resolution on 8 August, Gandhi said,

I trust the whole of India to-day to launch upon a non-violent struggle. I trust because of my nature to rely upon the innate goodness of human nature which perceives the truth and prevails during the crisis as if by instinct. But even if I am deceived in this, I shall not swerve. I shall not flinch.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Trends in the Freedom Struggle in Medinipur\***

The national movement in the phase of mass mobilization had a rather uneven record of development. There were periods of intense nationalist agitation in 1919, 1921-22, 1930-34 and 1942-44. A large group of nationalist workers worked regularly for the Congress through constructive activities and political propaganda. These activities maintained the strength of the Congress during the intervening periods. But generally speaking, after each point of climax wider mass participation seems to have declined. However, in certain areas the consciousness generated by the mass movements inspired widely diffused traditions of political mobilization which seem to have kept the popular initiative alive and thus helped to withstand the ebb-tide in the national movement. Such areas were not many in the overall context of British India,

\* Early British transliteration of Indian names often distorted their forms as well as pronunciation. A few names which frequently occur in this paper may be referred to by way of illustration. Medinipur, Kanthi and Khejuri were made Midnapore, Contai and Kedgerie. British transliteration of Indian names, particularly with regard to place names, was universally accepted. Recently the National Atlas of India has reformed the method of transliterating place names according to the original pronunciation and in keeping with the original form. In this paper I have adopted the National Atlas transliterations.

namely, the areas around Peshawar certain areas in the middle Gangetic plains and the eastern part of the Medinipur district, the Arambagh sub-division in Hugli district and the districts of Bankura and Purulia in southwest Bengal. It appears that the national movement had by 1930 become a part of the popular culture among peasants in these areas : in the 1930s this led to the development of something like a parallel authority to colonial rule. It was not surprising, then, that the district of Medinipur, or more precisely its eastern part consisting of the sub-divisions of Kanthi and Tamluk and the contiguous eastern *thanas* of the Sadar sub-division, became one of the areas where the Quit India Movement persisted longest—for about two years.

Referring to the intensity of political agitation in Medinipur and the hard mood of defiance of its peasantry, Birendranath Sasmal, who had organized the first mass movement against the British in Medinipur, said that had there been ten such areas in Bengal, British rule would have collapsed in one year. The British government, too, considered Medinipur the most serious local threat to their authority. An enquiry into the forces which operated in Medinipur between 1942 and 1944 may help us to trace the growth of that mood which exploded in an extensive mass upsurge on the occasion of the Quit India movement, and, to analyse the character of that upsurge.

#### **The Condition of the Peasantry**

The specific region to be focused upon, namely, the eastern part of the Medinipur district is described by the estuarial region consisting of the Kanthi and Tamluk sub-divisions and a few adjacent *thana* areas in the Sadar sub-division of the district. The estuarial region is divided into reverine tracts by the lower tributaries of the Ganga, namely the Rupnarayan, the Kansai-Haldi and the Keleghai-Rasulpur and is intersected by numerous creeks, canals and cuts. Rice is the main cash crop of this region. The other important products till the middle of nineteenth century were silk and salt. As the manufacture of these commodities and trade in them began to decline entrepreneurs turned towards landownership. They became *zamindars* under the terms of Permanent Settlement, or *jotdars* under the *Raiyatwari* settlement which prevailed on the extensive *jalpai* lands (wastelands reserved for growing fuel wood for salt panning) distributed over the lower part of the estuarial in the *thanas* of Pataspur, Bhagabanpur, Kanthi, Khejuri and Ramnagar in Kanthi, and in the *thanas* of Mahishadal, Sutahata and Nandigram in Tamluk. In the *jalpai* areas which were treated as *khas* (directly held by the government) lands were leased out as *chak* (extensive holdings allocated for



reclamation). Hence the lease-holders were known as *chakdars* (*jotdar* in modern parlance).

The more enterprising *chakdars* extended their interests to the lower Sundarbans across the Ganga where waste jungle lands were leased out in large chunks. The *chakdars* cultivated their lands by means of *bhagchashis* or sharecroppers, recruited from the ranks of the erstwhile sericulturists or salt makers, or brought in from outside. Beyond estuarial Medinipur and the Sundarbans, the *chakdars* had links with the district of Haora (Howrah) and Calcutta through trade in paddy, rice and hay. These links spanned the neighbouring districts and created a group of mercantile *jotdars*. The *jotdars* consolidated their highly exploitative system of economic control by giving paddy and cash loans to the small peasants who as sharecroppers were already under their influence. In this situation the *jotdars* found an opportunity to demand a very high rate of interest amounting to 50 percent of the principal, and also levied a number of illegal cesses. Together these exactions ate away between half and three-fourths of the *bhagchashi's* share. In addition the *jotdar* took all the hay. Under the circumstances the *bhagchashis* could never extricate themselves from debt and were forced to borrow afresh every year. Consequently the *bhagchashis* remained in perpetual bondage to the *jotdar*.<sup>45</sup>

In the upper part of the Tamluk sub-division—Tamluk, Panskura and Mayna *thanas*—small occupancy peasants were most numerous. Bounded by the Rupnarayan and the Kansai this part of Tamluk is a low-lying tract which perpetually suffered from water-logging. Neither the *zamindars* nor the government were interested in improving the land. As such productivity was low and crop failures were frequent. Naturally the economic position of the common peasantry was precarious. Considering the condition of land, incidence of rent was high. Yet the *zamindars* and their employees exacted a number of illegal cesses from the tenants in order to meet the expenses of establishment or towards occasional expenses in their households.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Earlier Experience in Mass Resistance**

Nationalism came to the villages of eastern Medinipur in 1921 when Birendranath Sasmal and other Congress leaders and workers began to tour the countryside to preach non-cooperation with the government and to spread the message of self-reliance and self-determination which constitute the essence of the Gandhian idea of Swaraj. The political aspirations of the people matured with the agitation against the Union Board. In January 1921, the government sought to supersede the age-old system of

village self-rule through the traditional *panchayat* by village-level Union Boards, which were partially elected bodies but were required to operate under strict official control. The villagers spontaneously resented the attempts to encroach upon their traditional rights, particularly because it was accompanied by a 50 per cent rise in the existing *Chowkidari* tax. The people felt that they were being made to pay for the destruction of their liberty. Moreover the burden of increased taxation appeared unbearable to the poorer section of the population. Birendranath and his colleagues in Congress took this opportunity to organize an extensive anti-Union Board agitation in Kanthi and the major part of Tamluk. The efforts of the Congress, reinforced by the tremendous personal appeal of Birendranath, brought the richer and the poorer sections of the people together under the banner of the Congress and inspired them to offer combined resistance to the new institution. The resistance was so strong and universal that the government was forced to withdraw the Union Boards from the whole of the Medinipur district.<sup>47</sup>

The anti-Union Board agitation created a broad front of the sections of the population against British rule, a phenomenon which was characteristic of the Indian National Congress. The success of the movement validated the broad front in which the rich farmers played a very important role through their links with the leadership as also due to their control of resources. But the experience of the movement produced contradictory effects as well. It generated a degree of self-confidence among the lower peasants. In early 1922, soon after the success of the anti-Union Board agitation, the sharecroppers of the Kanthi *thana* area formed a combination to campaign against the illegal exactions of the *jotdars*. The account of the campaign printed in the local Kanthi weekly called *Nihar*,<sup>48</sup> indicates the campaign was organized by the *bhagchashis* themselves on their own initiative and was carried on without the participation of any Congress leader. The campaign did not continue for long. Nor did it succeed in gaining any major concession : the *jotdars* agreed only to a minor reduction of cesses. But it is a singularly important event in as much as it focuses on the desire of the *bhagchashis* to assert their rights, on the one hand, and represents a spontaneous articulation of the inner contradiction of the broad front of the Congress, on the other. It will be seen later that it is the growing strength of the spontaneous mobilization of the lower peasantry even within the broad front of the Congress, which accounts for many of the vicissitudes of the mass movement in Medinipur.

After 1922 the *bhagchashi* agitation spread slowly to the other

parts of Kanthi and Tamluk. But officially the sub-divisional Congress leaders did not take notice of this phenomenon. The main plank of the Congress between 1921 and 1930, when the Civil Disobedience Movement began, was constructive activities. *Khadi* was the main item of this programme. Economically, the relief that *Khadi* brought to the common people may have been marginal, but the political and organizational and emotional significance of constructive work was considerable. It was the symbol of the right of self-determination, and represented the means of attaining this right through self-help and co-operative efforts. Organizationally constructive work helped in consolidating the lower-level units of the Congress into autonomous organizations which constituted the base of the Sub-divisional Congress Committee (henceforth SDCC).

Intensive constructive work by these autonomous units paid rich dividends in the Civil Disobedience Movement. This Movement began with a call to break the Salt Act—a call that struck a vital chord in the minds of the people of estuarial Medinipur. Manufacture of salt is a natural right in this region. People made salt for household consumption. Local entrepreneurs organized commercial production of salt which employed a large number of *malangis*. Commercial manufacture of salt was banned in 1878. Salt panning for private consumption was prohibited in 1921. However, salt was still made in a clandestine manner : for this the people were often harassed and humiliated by the police and by excise officials. The call to break the Salt Act meant to the people of the estuarial region not only the hope of prosperity, but also a means to avenge attacks upon their self-respect.

The campaign began on 6 April 1930 as a volunteer movement at the two major centres of Pichhabani (Kanthi) and Narghat (Tamluk). But soon the peasants took the initiative. Numerous centres for making contraband salt were set up all over Kanthi and Tamluk, without the aid of the Congress volunteers. In the major centres the steadfastness of the peasants kept the campaign going vigorously despite police repression. In the numerous outlying centres where the police could not reach, contraband salt began to be sold in the market. The no-tax campaign which began in June was as universal as the salt campaign. The extent and the intensity of the movement, which continued in spite of the stern measures adopted by the authorities, underlined two things : the strong spirit of defiance in the people and the helplessness of the government in dealing with such a situation.<sup>49</sup>

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931 conceded to the people of the coastal areas the right to make salt for private consumption, as well as for sale within a distance of twelve miles from the centre of

production. These provisions were almost invariably interpreted by the people of eastern Medinipur as the right to free manufacture and sale of salt. To the common people these concessions appeared to be, as Gobinda Dinda of Nimdasbar put it, 'the freedom of panning salt'.

The first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement instead of being a temporary high tide in nationalism in eastern Medinipur meant greater mobilization through the 1930s. The feeling of the common men was articulated by Gobinda Dinda when he said that, after getting the freedom of panning salt, '(we thought that we) will drive out the Englishmen. Then we might not pay taxes, we might not pay rent. Thus things will happen.'<sup>50</sup>

Immediately after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, there began a fresh tide of *bhagchashi* agitation. The peasants who were engaged in panning contraband salt quickly combined against the immediate oppressors, namely, the *jotdars*. They demanded complete abolition of all illegal cesses, a half share of paddy and hay, and liquidation of all outstanding debts. The *bhagchashis* refused to cultivate the lands of the *jotdars* until their demands were conceded. The *jotdars* retaliated by evicting the *bhagchashis*. Within a short period of time, the agitation spread over the major part of the Kanthi sub-division and the adjoining Nandigram thana in Tamluk. *Nihar* considered the movement to be an outcome of Gandhi's teachings. Nevertheless it posed a serious threat to the broad front of the Congress. The *bhagchashis* refused to recognize the *jotdars* in the Congress as Congressmen and openly disregarded their position of social importance. As the *bhagchashis* pressed their demands, tension increased and ultimately led to violent clashes between the two parties.<sup>51</sup> The *jotdars* sought the help of the police. By the middle of 1931, during the sowing season, the dispute assumed serious proportions in the Khejuri thana area. Alarmed by these developments the Kanthi SDCC leaders intervened and began to negotiate a settlement in Khejuri. They effected a compromise which conceded some of the major demands of the *bhagchashis*.<sup>52</sup>

The efforts of the Kanthi SDCC averted a split in the broad front of the Congress. It reduced the tension between the *bhagchashis* and the *jotdars*. The assurance of relief that the compromise held out was one of the major factors in retaining the hold of the Congress on the *bhagchashis* whose commitment to nationalism constituted the base of the parallel authority of the Congress. The official programme of the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement, which began in December 1931, consisted of non-payment of Chowkidari, punitive and collective

taxes, boycott of foreign goods and excise shops and defiance of prohibitory government orders. Under the systematic and ruthless repression by Willingdon's government, this second phase of the movement began to wane away in most parts of India after a few months of its inauguration. But in eastern Medinipur the movement went on unabated till it was officially called off in May 1934. The people doggedly adhered to the official Congress programme and bore the sufferings that followed. Indeed, in several places the scope of the Civil Disobedience was extended by the village-level Congressmen to include agrarian agitation.<sup>53</sup> The *bhagchashi* campaign spread to new areas, Pataspur and Sutahata, for instance. A no-rent campaign was organized by some local Congressmen in the Srirampur area of Tamluk. They felt the need to begin the campaign as a means to weaken the government. Since the *zamindars* paid revenue to the government, they argued, stoppage of rent would ultimately hit the latter.<sup>54</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement the Congress officially reverted to constructive work and propaganda, with the focus now on *khadi* and abolition of untouchability. But the lower level Congressmen diverted much of their attention to agrarian agitation which became one of the main prongs of political action in eastern Medinipur. In the *jalpai* areas the demands of the *bhagchashis* for 50 : 50 share of produce, abolition of cesses, liquidation of outstanding debt and reduction of interest, as well as resistance to eviction became much more extensive.

To begin with, the campaign proceeded by the standard method of discussion in groups and putting forth the demands through meetings, processions and propaganda by the *bhagchashi* agitators. The Congress leaders who had begun to take an increasing interest in this campaign, tried to bring about a compromise between the *jotdars* and the *bhagchashis*. The quieter means often turned into militant methods when the *jotdars* refused to concede the peasants' demands even partially, or to honour the terms of the agreement reached at the behest of the Congress leaders. The *bhagchashis* tried to boycott the *jotdars* socially and economically. Boycott included refusal to cultivate the lands of the *jotdars*. Alternatively the *bhagchashis* divided the crops on their own and took away their shares without the *jotdar's* consent, or even took both shares to their own huts. These developments led to numerous violent clashes between the *jotdars* and the *bhagchashis*, the frequency of which is reported to have been increasing in the last years of the 1930s when the Krishak Sabha (as the Kisan Sabha was known in Bengal) started penetrating into the rural areas of Medinipur. The government also took advantage of the situation.

The police intervened on the pretext of maintaining law and order. On the other hand, the District Magistrate began to go around the villages arbitrating between the two parties.<sup>55</sup>

About 1936 some of the village-level Congress workers in the Tamluk *thana* resolved to focus on the immediate grievances of the peasantry. These workers included Bansidhar Samanta of Gathra and Saratchandra Jana of Banpur. Initially they concentrated on the abolition of one of the cesses, namely *tahuri*, and on the proper maintenance of the drainage channels, and presented their complaints to the *zamindars*. The *zamindars* conceded neither of the demands. In protest, the peasants refused to pay *tahuri*. Upon this the *zamindars* began to adopt repressive measures. These events occurred in 1937 and 1938. In the following year the peasant agitators asked the tenants to stop paying rents unless the *zamindars* undertook to maintain the drainage channels. Thus in 1939, a no-rent campaign began in certain parts of the Tamluk *thana*. Gradually, the campaign spread over the other parts of the Tamluk *thana* and in certain areas of the neighbouring Panskura *thana*. A no-rent campaign is also known to have begun in the Dharendra area of the Kharagpur *thana* in the Sadar sub-division.<sup>56</sup>

The growing tension generated by the *bhagchashi* movement brought the inner contradictions of the broad front of the Congress into the forefront. The old veterans of the earlier movements perhaps realized that if the mass base of nationalism was to be preserved such agrarian agitations could not be avoided. But it was also apparent that since 1921 rich landowners had been the chief suppliers of resources to the Congress, and they had carved out an important position in the Congress machinery. Some of the Congress leaders may have formed patronage linkages with the *jotdars*. As such they could not extend full support to the egalitarian logic of the lower peasants' struggle for self-determination. This explains the middle path that the Kanthi SDCC leaders, namely, Pramathanath Bandyopadhyay, Iswar-chandra Mal and Nikunjabehari Maiti resorted to. In Kanthi the leaders always tried to effect a compromise on the basis of the Khejuri accord in the name of the Congress. Thus the peasant agitations were brought within the purview of the SDCC although these were not included in the official programme.<sup>57</sup>

The Tamluk SDCC leaders, Kumarchandra Jana, Satischandra Samanta, Ajaykumar Mukhopadhyay and Gunadhar Bhowmik, did not object to the activities of the peasant agitators; neither did they encourage the *bhagchashi* movement or the *anti-zamindar* campaigns. They tried to remain neutral leaving such campaigns to the lower-level organizers but also cautioning the peasant agitators

against violence. It is on the charge of violent activities that some of the militant peasant organizers like Bhupal Panda and Bankim Maiti were suspended from the Congress. The peasant organizers started their work as Congressmen, but sought political support and ideological guidance not from the SDCC leaders but from the Krishak Sabha with whom they came into contact in 1939. By this time Bhupal Panda, Bankim Maiti, Deben Das and few other peasant organizers from the Congress ranks had already forged links with the Krishak Sabha. Together these disaffected Congress peasant workers formed the base of the Krishak Sabha and of the Communist Party of India in eastern Medinipur. In the Tamluk, Panskura and Mayna *thanas*, the Krishak Sabha activists had gained considerable influence. They had some influence in the Mahishadal and Nandigram *thanas* also.<sup>58</sup>

In 1939 the Congress in eastern Medinipur suffered another loss. This was due to the split in the Indian National Congress and the establishment of the Forward Bloc by Subhash Chandra Bose. There were many admirers of Subhash Bose among the Congress leaders and workers, including those who had participated in the Gandhian mass movements, but especially those who had links with the terrorist movements which had a strong centre in the Medinipur town, were followers of Subhash Bose. During the latter half of the 1930s, a section of the students even in the remote villages were inspired more by Subhas than by Gandhi whom they considered to be guilty of compromising with the British and hence rightist.<sup>59</sup> In 1939 most of the followers of Subhash Bose and some of his admirers switched over to the Forward Bloc. The leaders who joined the new party included Pramathanath Bandyopadhyay, Basantakumar Das, Balailal Das Mahapatra, Sudhir Das and Kalipada Ray Mahapatra of Kanthi and Baradakanta Kuiti of Tamluk.

Developments since 1934 thus tended to split the Congress vertically. Many *jotdars* had begun to move away from the Congress and to take the help of the government in suppressing the *bhagchashi* agitation. A considerable section of the peasant activists had set up a parallel organization and had developed links with the CPI. Another section of the militant nationalists had gone over to the Forward Bloc. The main trends generated by the nationalist movement persisted at the lower levels. The mood of defiance had become deeply entrenched and the people had developed the capacity to launch a struggle on their own initiative. The growth of an organized Kisan movement, and perhaps the bait of debt-relief roused by the Debtors' Relief Act of 1939 passed by the Krishak Praja Party-Muslim League government of Bengal contributed further to the mobilization of the peasantry. Evident-

ly, however, the lower peasantry was divided between the Congress, the Forward Bloc and the Krishak Sabha. It was in such circumstances that the Second World War broke out in September 1939 and the Congress decided to non-cooperate with the government's War efforts.

### **The Immediate Origins of the Quit India Movement in Medinipur**

Immediately after the Congress declared its policy of non-cooperation with the War efforts, the government took steps to curb the activities of the nationalists. Medinipur was especially singled out for governmental control because of its previous record of resistance to colonial rule. Immediately after the outbreak of the War, the Defence of India Rules were promulgated in Medinipur abrogating the due process of law. Public meetings and processions without official permission were banned. A reassessment of cess revaluation was criticized by the Congress. Protest meetings were banned.<sup>60</sup> In Kanthi, an order was issued prohibiting the use of the first and second class bricks for private purposes.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time the local officials were trying to collect war subscriptions and sell war bonds by coercive means. Even the poor were compelled to purchase bonds. The officials also tried to force people to salute the Union Jack. Popular response to such measures was truculent. Refusal met with the wrath of the officials who began to harass the people, impose fines on them and even arrest them on one pretext or another.<sup>62</sup>

The worst harassment began after Japan entered the War in December 1941 and swept Malaya and Burma in quick succession. Apprehending a Japanese attack on India from the Bay of Bengal, the government introduced a drastic Denial Policy. First, motor buses were withdrawn from the roads and the few permitted to ply were allocated incredibly low amounts of petrol. Then followed an order on 8 April 1942 to remove within nine hours all boats of the Kanthi sub-division, and the Nandigram and Mayna *thanas* of the Tamluk sub-division, to Ranichak in the Ghatal sub-division, which was from 30 to 90 miles away from the areas of ban. Since it was impossible to carry out the order, the remaining boats were destroyed or sunk. All this created immense opportunities of corruption for the petty government officials who were to implement the order. A nominal compensation was offered. Even this was not paid in some cases. After this came the order of removal of all bicycles from the major parts of Tamluk and Kanthi. The compensation offered for each conveyance was ludicrous; it varied between 8 annas and Rs. 10.<sup>63</sup>

Boats were the most important means of conveyance in estuarial



Medinipur, where good roads were few and far between, and then too were frequently broken by the numerous water channels. Export of paddy rice and hay was the basis of the region's cash economy. This depended entirely on boats since water transport was the only means of communication in the Sundarbans. A large number of people of this region, both rich and poor, depended on the agriculture and trade of the Sundarbans. Eastern Medinipur had a large population of fishermen who were also entirely dependent on boats. Without boats it was impossible to get supplies of essential goods like kerosene, medicine and cloth from outside. Thus the withdrawal of boats was a severe blow to the livelihood and prosperity of the people.

Even before this, economic distress had hit eastern Medinipur. The *aman* paddy harvest in 1941, which was the source of both food and cash, had partially failed.<sup>64</sup> Yet the government considered Medinipur as a surplus district and began to procure rice to build up stocks for the army. Procurement was entrusted to Ispahani and Co., a company known for its commitment to the Muslim League. Their agents began to buy up paddy and rice in Medinipur from the middle of 1941. The Tamluk SDCC protested against procurement to the District Magistrate Niaz Muhammad Khan, ICS, so that the people could be left with reserves for possible distress. But the authorities refused to pay any heed to the protest.<sup>65</sup>

Failing to move the authorities the Congress in Tamluk and Kanthi decided to forcibly prevent procurement. Congressmen began to persuade the villagers not to sell rice and paddy and offered *satyagraha* on the roads through which procurement carts passed, as well as in the markets of Sutahata, Chaitanyapur, Terapekhya, Mahishadal, Nandakumar, Geonkhali and Byabartahat in Tamluk. In Kanthi Congress workers began to patrol the water courses, particularly between Rasulpur *ghat*, Kalinagar *ghat* and Petua *ghat*. The Congress workers seized the procurement boats, or sent them back to the villages. The boatmen who refused to comply with the instructions of the Congress were detained or beaten up, or their boats were destroyed.<sup>66</sup> As expected, the Government tried to break the anti-procurement drive. Many Congress workers were arrested under the Defence of India Rule.<sup>67</sup> The efforts made by the Congress to resist oppression, particularly the drive against procurement, made it the focal point of resistance to the government and the people began to rally round the Congress in increasing numbers. Ordinary peasants who had moved away from the Congress in the previous years began to return to the Congress, which again emerged as the chief spokesman of the common people.

Thus even before the AICC meeting in Bombay between 6 and 8 August 1942 which passed the Quit India resolution government officials and the Congress in eastern Medinipur were confronting each other as bitter enemies.

### **The Quit India Movement in Medinipur between 9 August and 27 September 1942**

The Quit India resolution of 8 August and the arrest of the leaders on the next day, which sparked off an open rebellion in different parts of India in the second week of August, did not have an immediate impact in Medinipur. Medinipur was relatively calm throughout the month of August although the earlier agitation against procurement drive continued and political activities were intensified by the holding of frequent meetings and demonstrations in public places. In fact, the Quit India Movement was formally launched only on 29 September, i.e., 50 days after the Quit India resolution had been adopted. The district officials believed that lack of knowledge about the programme of the movement was the reason for the delay.<sup>68</sup> Some of the leaders of the movement also said this,<sup>69</sup> but this does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation of the relative calm in Medinipur throughout August when people in many other places had risen in revolt.

Not far from Medinipur, the movement had spread in many parts of Bengal including the neighbouring districts of Hugli, Bankura and Purulia, as well as in Calcutta. Civil administration completely collapsed in the Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum district for some time. The district authorities were seriously threatened in the Balurghat sub-division in Dinajpur district where the Santals, Rajbansis and Paliyas participated in the rebellion. It is unlikely that Congressmen in Medinipur were unaware of these developments. Prior intimation about the movement had also reached Medinipur. As early as 9 June 1942, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Dr. Sures Bandyopadhyay and Annada Prasad Chowdhury had met the Congressmen of Medinipur, apparently at Gandhi's behest, and asked them to prepare for a movement to throw the British out of India before the Japanese invaded the country. They said that Gandhi was determined to launch the movement even if the Congress did not agree with him and that this may even lead to civil war.<sup>70</sup>

The actual reason for the delay may be found in the political situation in the district. The local leaders, who had considerable experience in organizing mass movements, did not dare launch a campaign without solving certain political problems and building up the necessary organizational strength. In the context of the political tension that had been building up in Medinipur since the

outbreak of the War it may not have been possible for any other agency, the student force, for example, to swing the masses into action without official Congress backing.

After the Quit India Movement began, a group of influential Congress leaders of Medinipur came to the conclusion that the movement was violent in nature and could not have been approved by Gandhi. Hence they intended to dissociate themselves from such a movement. These leaders included Hansadhvaj Maiti, Naliniranjan Hota of Tamluk and Bijay Maiti, Bhupen Maiti, Satis Jana and Hrishikesh Gayen of Kanthi.<sup>71</sup> The majority of the Congress leaders may not have held such views, but they could not decide what should be done in such a situation. Originally the Congress leaders of Medinipur apparently thought of organizing a *satyagraha*.<sup>72</sup> The preparations that the Congress leaders were making since June appear to have been directed to such a purpose. But when the movement assumed an entirely new and militant form, the Congress leaders found it difficult to decide upon any course of action.

The other political groups differed vehemently from the Congress. The Forward Bloc was out for militant action. Officially the party had joined the movement and fully participated in the militant actions. But the other important political forces, consisting of the Krishak Sabha and Communist activists, were entirely opposed to the movement in accordance with the official line of the Communist Party of India.

It took some time for the Congress leaders to come to an agreement and to solve the political tangles and build up a united organization for the movement. Meanwhile militancy had been growing among the common people. The tendency accentuated under the influence of the students. Schools and colleges were closed down in Calcutta after 9 August. Youths from eastern Medinipur studying in Calcutta began to drift back to their homes. They carried with them stories of militant actions which they had seen or heard of. The students in the schools and colleges of Tamluk, Kanthi and Medinipur town also became restive. Some of them had imbibed militant nationalism from the extremist political workers who had been working secretly in the villages of this region and had built up a considerable following among the youth. According to Pulinbehari Sen, who led the militia in Khejuri during the Quit India Movement, these secret workers trained the youth in the use of arms, such as *lathis* and daggers, distributed revolutionary literature and inspired them to take the path of violent struggle. It is under the influence of these extremists that Pulin Sen became convinced of the necessity of armed uprising :

he also developed a partiality for Subhash Bose, although he did not join the Forward Bloc.<sup>73</sup>

Young students like Pulin Sen, Upendranath Jana, Kaustabh-kanti Karan, Birendranath Mal and Abha Maiti of Khejuri and Prabhataditya Giri, Bangabhushan Bhaktya, Gorachand Ghorui, Amulya Bhowmik and Prabirchandra Jana of Nandigram and Mrityunjay Maiti, Sudhirchandra Parya, Rabindranath Maiti and Bibek Dhara of Bhagabanpur found in Gandhi's call for open rebellion the opportunity to vindicate their faith. Recalling their attitude at the time of the movement, Pulin Sen observed:

We believed that organization would have to be built up in the non-violent way; there are certain difficulties in adopting violent methods while building up an organization. But a time may come when there is no alternative but to adopt violent means. In 1942 we thought that such a time had arrived... We did not feel that Gandhi had abandoned the non-violent path and switched over to violent methods. But Gandhiji's instruction was that, in his absence, we should be guided by the manner in which the people themselves reacted to repression. Whatever the people did on their own initiative in the absence of Gandhi and the other reputed leaders of the Congress had to be taken as the programme of the Congress, and the Congress would stand by it.<sup>74</sup>

The students began to spread the message of militant action. Developments in Medinipur since the outbreak of the War had prepared the ground for militancy. But there was nobody who could organize mass actions. The Forward Bloc activists did not command sufficient strength to launch the movement. Some of the Congress leaders remained aloof, while the rest were hesitant or uncertain. Thus the initiative passed into the hands of students, who emerged as a leading political force.

After the arrest of the Kanthi Congress leaders on 21 August, students of the Prabhatkumar College of Kanthi who included Prabhataditya Giri, Bangabhushan Bhaktya, Prabirchandra Jana, Sudhirchandra Parya and Rabindranath Maiti, left the college. They organized the picketing of educational institutions in Kanthi town and student demonstrations. All educational institutions were closed down and students began to enroll themselves as volunteers. Then the student agitators started for their homes on foot. On the way they held a series of meetings in the villages they passed through and delivered fiery speeches which roused the passion of the people to a high pitch. They were joined by other

student activists like Pulinbehari Sen. Back in their homes, the student agitators toured the neighbouring villages, forcibly closing village schools and urging school students and other young men to join the movement. Soon the agitators became the focus of the campaign, tending to overshadow even senior Congress workers. In certain areas, Khejuri, Nandigram and Bhagabanpur for instance, the initial organization for a militant movement was built up by the student agitators who also led the volunteer corps. The militant volunteer corps of Mahishadal and Satahata, which initiated the movement in these areas, were composed of school students and young men.<sup>75</sup>

By the middle of August, the split between the orthodox followers of non-violence and the rest of the Congress leaders appears to have been complete. After the rift, Congress and Forward Bloc leaders of Kanthi decided, at a joint meeting held at Betrakunda sometime in the middle of August, to close their ranks and prepare for the movement. The meeting was attended by some student representatives.<sup>76</sup> The student and youth force, and the mood of militancy among the people, appears to have forced the hands of the Tamluk SDCC. Sometime after the middle of August, the SDCC was purged of the orthodox followers of non-violence. A new committee was formed, and Susilkumar Dhara, who organized and led the militia of Tamluk during the Quit India Movement, was made the secretary of the SDCC.<sup>77</sup>

The third important force in Tamluk was the Krishak Sabha which a considerable section of Congress workers had joined. A large section of the peasantry was under the influence of the Krishak Sabha, which was officially opposed to the movement. But its supporters and the majority of its workers could not escape the impact of the general mood of militancy. There were doubts in the rank and file as to what they should do when the movement began. To resolve this problem some of the Krishak Sabha activists convened a meeting in Putputia and requested both Ajay Mukhopadhyay and Bhupal Panda to argue their points before the audience. Having heard both of them, the majority of the Krishak Sabha workers decided to discard the views of the Sabha and join the movement. The final break occurred on the occasion of the Anti-Japanese Conference held at the same site a few days later.<sup>78</sup> According to prominent Krishak Sabha organizers, most of the activists and supporters of the Sabha participated in the Quit India Movement.<sup>79</sup> Some of the communist organizers, such as Haren Mitra and Rabi Mitra of Kespur, also took a leading part in the movement.

Political divisions and the confusion over the programme

notwithstanding, the Congress in eastern Medinipur had begun preparations for a movement as long ago as June 1942. A large band of volunteers was raised in Tamluk. Both in Mahishadal and in Tamluk the corps consisted of 3,000 trained men. The number soon rose to 5,000. A large sum of money was collected and a substantial stock of rice was built up.<sup>80</sup>

After 9 August, *hartals* were organized and numerous demonstrations held in Kanthi and Tamluk. In Tamluk the Congress called for a boycott of government offices and courts. Meetings and processions attended by 5,000 to 10,000 persons were held in front of the government offices.<sup>81</sup> In Mahishadal trained volunteers in uniform used to parade before the *thana* and hold meetings there. On one such occasion the Sub-divisional Officer of Tamluk, Wazir Ali Shaik, ICS, ordered constables to disperse the demonstrators with a *lathi* charge. But the constables refused.<sup>82</sup> In Pingla in the Sadar sub-division, a procession walked straight into the *thana* building where the District Magistrate, N. M. Khan, ICS, and S. G. Taylor, IPS, Superintendent of Police, Medinipur, were present.<sup>83</sup> Vendors and shopkeepers refused to sell food stuff and other commodities to government employees, and a daily supply of provisions from Medinipur town had to be brought by government vehicles.<sup>84</sup>

A War Council was formed in Kanthi in the middle of August, after the Congress and the Forward Bloc leaders closed their ranks. The council consisted of six members, three from each of the two parties.<sup>85</sup> For all practical purposes, however, the Forward Bloc merged with the Congress. Soon after the setting up of the War Council its senior members, Rashbehari Pal, Nikunjabehari Maiti and Sudhir Das were arrested.<sup>86</sup> With their arrest the leadership of the council passed into the hands of the second rank, such as Bhimacharan Patra, Kangalchand Giri, Bhuteswar Parya, who were also veterans of the earlier movements, and the younger Forward Bloc members, Balailal Das Mahapatra and Sasibhushan Pal. In Tamluk the reconstituted SDCC transformed itself into a War Council.<sup>87</sup>

By the end of August, the War Council leaders came into contact with Annadaprasad Chowdhuri, a member of the central directorate of the Quit India Movement, and a few Bengal Provincial Congress Committee members. Annada Chowdhuri met the Tamluk and Kanthi leaders in Asthichak village in Egra *thana* (Kanthi) and gave them a specific programme, guidance and fund to begin the movement.<sup>88</sup>

After receiving the programme, the War Councils of Kanthi and Tamluk began to make specific preparations for implementing it.

A large volunteer corps already existed in Tamluk. The Kanthi Congress was also trying to raise a corps consisting of 1,000 men in each *thana*.<sup>89</sup> A separate volunteer force, consisting of specially selected young men and students, was set up in Tamluk, Mahishadal, Nandigram and Sutahata. The force received basic military training in drill, attack and self-defence, as well as guerrilla tactics, under the guidance of Susilkumar Dhara who commanded the volunteer corps of Mahishadal. Initially the volunteer corps had three branches, namely, action, intelligence and nursing. The Mahishadal volunteer corps was named Bidyut Bahini (Lightning Army). Women volunteers were recruited in Mahishadal and Sutahata to form a Bhagini Sena (Sister's Army).<sup>90</sup>

A camp was set up on a huge sand dune in the village of Belbani in Ramnagar *thana* on 12 September in order to build up a specially trained volunteer force, called Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army). This was the central training camp for Kanthi sub-division, under the command of Balailal Das Mahapatra, who had received training in volunteer organization and in military action in Abhay Asram at Kumilla as well as in the Bihar Vidyapith. In this camp the volunteers were trained in sabotage, in the use of *lathi* in self-defence, as well as in the basic features of guerrilla warfare. Volunteers so trained went back to their respective areas in order to impart similar training in the local camps.<sup>91</sup>

In the following months the trained volunteers remained in the forefront of many mass actions in Tamluk and Kanthi. Commenting on the actions led by the volunteers, a government report observed that

Operations of the rebels indicate considerable care in planning, an effective warning system had been devised, elementary tactical principles were observed by encirclement and flanking movements clearly on pre-arranged signals; the forces of disorder were accompanied by doctors and nursing orderlies to attend to casualties; and the intelligence system is clearly efficient since movements contemplated by police and troops are very early known and measures taken to forestall them.<sup>92</sup>

Direct confrontation with the government forces began on 8 September. A crowd of 2,500 persons sought to prevent the export of rice by the millowners of Danipur, and tried to take possession of the entire stock of rice in the mills. The police fired upon the crowd, killing three persons. As there was no Congress volunteer present at that time, Congressmen were called from a distance of eight miles. At the behest of the Congressmen, the police agreed to hand over the dead bodies to the people. However, they

proceeded to throw them into the river that night. When the people recovered the bodies, the police snatched them away. On the next day the District Magistrate raided the surrounding villages and arrested two hundred men. Meanwhile, the millowners surrendered to the Congressmen who fined them Rs. 2000.<sup>93</sup>

On 9 September a party of armed police had arrested a few nationalist leaders in village. An angry mob surrounded the police party and rescued the leaders. A few days later, on 20 September, the police raided the Congress camp in Bhagabanpur and arrested forty workers. The arrested persons were taken to the police station where Samar Sen, ICS, Sub-divisional Officer of Kanthi, and the Additional Superintendent of Police, Medinipur, were present. A large crowd consisting of about 10,000 persons surrounded the police station and tried to rescue the arrested Congress workers. The officers released 29 persons but the crowd demanded the immediate release of the rest as well. When the officers refused to yield, the enraged people burnt the motor launch by which the officers had come and again surrounded the police station. The confined officers had to be rescued by reinforcements rushed from Medinipur town.

On the same day Intelligence Branch officers leading police forces were attacked in Bhagabanpur and Pichhabani, the celebrated centre of Salt *satyagraha*. Next day the post office at Bhimeswari in Bhagabanpur was burnt down and cuts were made on the Kanthi-Ramnagar metalled road at Sarshebari (Mahisgoth) near Pichhabani. On the following day, i.e. 22 September, the administration forced a group of people in the neighbouring villages to repair the road. As the news of this incident spread, a large number of villagers assembled at the point and sought to prevent the repair work. Upon this Samar Sen, who later earned great notoriety for brutal and inhuman repression, went to Sarshebari with an armed police force. Near the cut on the road Sen faced a large crowd led by Purna Raut and others. While talking to Raut, Samar Sen gave the signal for firing without any warning or notice and hit Purna Raut with his own revolver. As a result of the firing four persons were killed.<sup>94</sup>

Two incidents took place on the 27th. At Iswarpur in Nandigram *thana*, the police had gone to arrest two persons in the local Congress office. A 5,000 strong mob, armed with *lathis* and choppers, surrounded the police who opened fire in order to find an escape route. Two persons were killed. Yet the mob followed the police party and surrounded it again at the Narghat ferry, where the police opened fire again. The mob dispersed but destroyed the schools, offices, ferry building and boats.<sup>95</sup> During the same night, Samar Sen and Taylor raided the Belbani camp



with a large party of armed police. Soon after their arrival the residents of the neighbouring village collected there and tried to envelop the raiders. The police opened fire killing four men and thus made their way to the camp which was deserted by that time.<sup>96</sup>

Mass action and police firing in close succession brought the tension which had been building up all over eastern Medinipur to a crescendo. By 27 September the District Officer found that 'The villagers were roused to a state of fury ... They were ready for a sort of guerrilla warfare'.<sup>97</sup>

### **The Quit India Movement in Medinipur, 28 September 1942 and After**

In the midst of growing tension, the leaders of the War Councils of Kanthi and Tamluk decided to organize mass action to destroy the symbols of governmental authority and paralyse the administration. The *thana* buildings were the main target of attack, but other government buildings were also to be destroyed. In a joint meeting the leaders of Tamluk and Kanthi decided to launch simultaneous attacks on the *thanas* and other government buildings on 29 September.<sup>98</sup> Then the leaders of Kanthi and Tamluk met in separate meetings to fix up the details of the actions in their respective sub-divisions. In these meetings the *thana* leaders were entrusted with the charge of their respective areas.<sup>99</sup>

Mass action against the government was launched in seven *thanas*, three in the Kanthi sub-division and four in the Tamluk sub-division, between 28 and 30 September. The *thanas* concerned were Khejuri, Bhagabanpur and Pataspur in Kanthi, and Tamluk, Mahishadal, Sutahata and Nandigram in Tamluk. Egra, Kanthi and Ramnagar *thanas* in Kanthi sub-division and Panskura and Mayna *thanas* in Tamluk sub-division were not raided. But soon after the *thana* raids mass action spread in the Ramnagar and Kanthi *thanas* of the Kanthi sub-division and the Sabang and Kespur *thanas* of the Sadar sub-division.<sup>100</sup>

Elaborate preparations were made for raiding the *thanas*. Efforts were made to assemble as many persons as possible, and plans were made for simultaneous attacks on the *thana* from different directions by dividing the people into different groups. Arrangements were made to isolate the *thana* buildings before the attack was made. During the night of 28 September, the main roads of the Tamluk sub-division were broken by cutting breaches at several points and by breaking the culverts. Trees were felled and laid across the roads. Telegraph wires were cut and telegraph posts were broken and uprooted.

There seems to have been a lapse in co-ordination about the timing of the *thana* raids in Kanthi. The Khejuri and Pataspur *thanas* were attacked on the night of the 28th and Bhagabanpur on the afternoon of the 29th. In a surprise frontal attack Khejuri and Pataspur *thanas* were captured by the people. 6,000 men divided into three groups raided the Khejuri *thana* from three sides. Pataspur *thana* was attacked by 7,000 men from four directions. In both cases the police personnel were arrested, their arms seized and the *thana* buildings burnt.

The incidents on the 28th night must have alerted the other *thanas*. Besides, Bhagabanpur *thana* was provided with additional armed police. The leaders of Bhagabanpur had planned to charge the *thana* buildings simultaneously from four sides. 10,000 persons were divided into four groups for this purpose. But the group on the south started the attack before the other groups were ready for action. This gave the police the opportunity to concentrate on one side only. Heavy police firing, which killed sixteen persons, repulsed the raiders. The retreat of the front group led to chaos on the other three sides, and the crowd withdrew. Among the sixteen persons killed by police firing, there were two young students, Bibhutibhushan Das and Krishnamohan Chakrabarti.

Tamluk, Mahishadal and Sutahata *thanas* were raided on the afternoon of the 29th. Twenty thousand persons had collected in Tamluk town and proceeded in five groups towards the *thana*. According to government sources, the police was seriously threatened in Tamluk. Reinforced by a military picket, the police opened fire at three points. Heavy firing killed ten persons including Lakshminarayan Das (13), Purimadhab Pramanik (14) and Matangini Hazra (73).

Mahishadal *thana* was attacked by 12,000 men. But there being only one access to the *thana* the attack could not be spread out in different directions. However, the *thana* was attacked repeatedly, in fact four times with the Bidyut Bahini forming the vanguard. On each occasion the crowd was heavily fired upon by the police and by a bodyguard of the Mahishadal Raj family, who had sent this man and a liberal supply of bullets to the *thana*. The crowd withdrew after the fourth attempt. Thirteen persons including Asutosh Kulia (18), Sudhirchandra Hazra (27) and Dwarikanath Sahu (57) were killed in Mahishadal.

As in Khejuri and Pataspur, the Sutahata *thana* fell to the raiders who proceeded in two groups, 20,000 each. Led by the Bidyut Bahini the crowd surprised the police, captured and disarmed them, seized the arms and set fire to the *thana* building.

The attention of the people in Nandigram was diverted on the

29th by the presence of a Deputy Magistrate and a party of police and military at Iswarpur. 6,000 men, armed with *lathis* and choppers, attacked the Deputy Magistrate's party who opened fire to disperse the crowd. On the two preceding days, police firing had killed six persons, four at Iswarpur on the 27th and two at Brindabanpur on the 28th. Nandigram *thana* was raided on the 30th by a crowd of 10,000 men. The police fired upon the crowd from an advantageous position, killing seven persons including Biharilal Karan (22) and Shaikh Alauddin (40), and compelling the people to withdraw.

Heavy firing had beaten back the mob at four *thanas*, but three *thanas* had fallen to the rebels. Between 29 and 30 September civil administration completely collapsed in the sub-divisions of Kanthi and Tamluk. The people went on destroying the government offices and buildings, roads and the telegraph and telephone lines. Referring to these attacks, M. M. Basu, ICS, Additional District Magistrate, reported,

The attacks take place so suddenly and simultaneously that no preventive action could be taken before hand. In many places information about threatened attacks was received extremely late owing to the fact that communication had been seriously sabotaged and information had to be sent by special messengers who had to select devious routes for avoiding molestation on the way.<sup>101</sup>

As a matter of fact almost the entire region had passed under the control of the Congress. Most of the *thana* headquarters were practically cut off from the sub-divisional towns, and there were attempts to isolate the latter from the district town. The District Magistrate reported that 'large crowds of peasantry are roaming all over the countryside ready to fall on and overpower any small government agency.'<sup>102</sup>

The uprising in eastern Medinipur which was characterized by Herbert, Governor of Bengal, as a 'large scale rebellion'<sup>103</sup> seriously alarmed the government. Military reinforcements were rushed in. Two platoons of the Garhwali Regiment, one company of the Eastern Frontier Rifles and one troop of the Hyderabad Lancers were despatched to Kanthi. Tamluk was provided with four platoons of the Lincolnshire Regiment and one company of the Punjabi Regiment. Besides, one company of the Lincolnshire Regiment was stationed at the Hugli point across the Ganga. A plane of the Royal Air Force was kept ready to assist the military. But the District Magistrate demanded ten more platoons of

military and the Additional Superintendent of Police wanted military deployment everywhere because police morale was very low. The Superintendent of Police felt that 'The troops who come should have automatic weapons (Bren guns and Tommy guns) and unlimited ammunition. One can never be sure as to what lengths they (the nationalist rebels) will go'.<sup>104</sup>

Deployment of the military, however, failed to improve the situation. The people appeared to be completely defiant and very well organized. Armed police parties were attacked by the crowds. In Khejuri an armed police party consisting of Garhwalis and led by the Circle Officer, was overpowered by the crowd and their guns were taken away. A similar incident occurred in Keshpur in the Sadar Sub-division which had also risen in revolt. In the Keshpur market a crowd led by Rabindranath Mitra captured a party of Garhwali armed force and stripped them of their arms. These incidents prompted N.M. Khan, the District Magistrate, to plead for replacement of the Garhwalis by Punjabi Muslims or Sikhs.<sup>105</sup>

The people attacked even the military detachments. A platoon of the Eastern Frontier Rifles sent under the Additional Superintendent of Police to recover the Pataspur *thana* was attacked by a crowd, 2,500 strong. The Deputy Inspector General of Police of Bengal went with a party of the Lincolnshire Regiment to reestablish control of Satahata *thana*. Near the *thana* the party was challenged by a crowd which tried to surround it. In Narghat an attempt was made to encircle and confine the troops camping there. In Srirampur a 500 strong crowd made a determined attempt to block the road in order to prevent the movement of a military party. Such attempts invariably resulted in firing. But as M.M. Basu, Additional District Magistrate, noted, 'The mob in Tamluk Sub-division is apparently not afraid of (police or military) firing'.<sup>106</sup>

The attacks made by the crowd on the police and the military appear to have been well-planned. According to government sources, the villagers kept watch on army movements and always had prior information of the arrival of government forces, information that was conveyed by means of conch shell signals. The District Magistrate admitted in a report dated 13 October 1942 that the morale of the rebels was high, and the combined civil and military action was only partially effective. The rebels continued to have 'complete control over vast tracts' in the sub-divisions of Kanthi and Tamluk and the Keshpur *thana* in the Sadar sub-division.<sup>107</sup>

On 16 October the sub-divisions of Tamluk and Kanthi were

ravaged by a devastating cyclone and tidal bore which rose to a height of twenty feet in the coastal tracts. According to the official estimate, 10,000 persons were killed. Nearly fifty per cent of the houses were destroyed or damaged and seventy-five per cent of the cattle perished.<sup>108</sup> Even these severe calamities did not break the morale of the people. Official circles admitted that the movement was carried on vigorously even after the devastation. In addition to fighting the government, the Congress now began to organize relief for the suffering people.

The government suppressed the news of the devastation for about fifteen days and neglected relief work. Taking a clue from the attitude in Calcutta, N.M. Khan, the District Magistrate, recommended to the Chief Secretary that 'relief be withheld from the disaffected villages until the people hand over the stolen guns and give an undertaking that they will take no further part in any Congress movement'.<sup>109</sup> But Taylor, the Superintendent of Police, thought withholding relief on political grounds would be injudicious; any delay in giving relief would encourage the people to seek Congress help, and then the Congress would claim that it was more powerful than the government.<sup>110</sup> After considerable delay, the government started relief work. But the people's hatred of the government was so strong that Taylor found that even as late as 27 October, 'very few persons have come forward as yet to ask for help, though there must be thousands who are homeless and without food and good water'.<sup>111</sup>

Soon after the *thana* raids on 28 and 29 September a parallel Congress administration was set up in Khejuri, Bhagabanpur and Pataspur. As shown below, the parallel nationalist administration did multifarious jobs. But their main activities were to fight the government forces with militia and to protect the people from repression and distress. In early November 1942 the Kanthi War Council was converted into a Swaraj Panchayat or Independent Republican Government in order to coordinate the work of the *thana* level parallel administrations, as well as for better organization of resistance to government and relief work at the sub-divisional level.

During the month of October government counter actions were confined mostly to the places around the *thana* headquarters and the vicinity of the metalled roads which were few. For example, Khejuri was outside official control till the end of October, and Manglamaro, the headquarters of the nationalist administration in Pataspur, could not be raided by government forces till that time. By the beginning of November the government began to step up the measures for breaking the rebellion. Police morale was still

very low and the police did not dare move about without the army. However the presence of a large military force and their regular patrolling in the countryside gradually created better conditions for police raids in the interior. Under military protection, the police began extensive looting, destruction, arson, incredible physical torture, firing and above all, organized rape which was carried on with remarkable ferocity in Tamluk. All over Kanthi and Tamluk the military and the police made systematic attempts to ravage the countryside, destabilize the life of the people and terrorize them by the most savage means. Government sources admit that the people in general were hostile and unsympathetic to the government, and no group except for the Communists and a section of the Muslims supported the government.<sup>112</sup> The Communists are reported to have given 'effective assistance to the Government' in suppressing the movement in Tamluk.<sup>113</sup> Muslims worked as government spies and even participated in repression all over Kanthi and Tamluk till the end of the movement.<sup>114</sup> Besides, there were some other loyalists like Sarat Maiti of Bhagabanpur, Phanindranath Manna of Bartan, Srimanta Das of Jararnagar and Tarini Mandal of Terapara who acted as police informers and spies and helped the police in arresting the nationalist workers and leaders.<sup>115</sup>

Niaz Muhammad Khan, District Magistrate of Medinipur at this time, was cruel and vindictive. Taylor, the Superintendent of police, felt that he was fighting a rebellion and personally behaved with dignity. Wazir Ali Shaik, the Sub-Divisional Officer of Tamluk, was not excessively brutal and was not an 'efficient' officer by official standards. He was severely criticized for his drawbacks by the Inspector General of Police. But his counterpart in Kanthi, Samar Sen, carried on repression with vengeance. Lower down the hierarchy, B. K. Ghosh, Special Magistrate posted in Kanthi, Sudhansu Dasgupta, Khasmahal Manager of Kanthi, the British Sub-divisional Police Officer of Tamluk and the police Sub-Inspectors, Nalini Raha and Nirad Datta, in Tamluk and Kanthi respectively had become notorious for their systematic barbarity and sadism. B. K. Ghosh and Nalini Raha in particular carried on repression with a calculation and ferocity that was rare.<sup>116</sup>

In spite of the repression, the power of the nationalist rebels in Kanthi is reported to have been undiminished throughout the months of November and December 1942. No outsider was allowed to enter the rebels' strongholds in Unions I-VI in the Khejuri *thana*. New camps of the rebels were being set up in Kanthi and Tamluk in December. Government sources indicate

that during this month the rebels continued to be strong in Pataspur; in Khejuri, the nationalist administration compelled the local merchants to sell paddy and rice at the rates fixed by it, and in Bhagabanpur the rebels banned movement of rice from one Union to another.

It was only after December that the movement suffered a setback in Khejuri, Bhagabanpur and Pataspur. However the parallel nationalist administration was found to have a hold on certain parts of Bhagabanpur even after February 1943. In that month, several important leaders of Kanthi including Gobinda Bag of Pataspur, Nabin Mahapatra and Bhimacharan Patra of Bhagabanpur were arrested. In mid-February 1943, the Inspector General of Police reported that 'There is no denying the fact that Contai now has very nearly cleared up. It is very fast returning to normal.'<sup>117</sup> In the same month the military was withdrawn from Kanthi. However, such prominent nationalist rebel leaders as Balailal Das Mahapatra, Kalipada Ray Mahapatra and Pulinbehari Sen could not be arrested and continued the rebellion in Kanthi, though on a reduced scale, throughout 1943 and even later.

Extensive repression, insecurity of life and property and the effects of the natural calamities which threatened to destabilize normal life led the Tamluk War Council to consolidate the rebellion into the distinct organizational form of a parallel government. The pamphlet which announced the establishment of the parallel government described the situation leading up to the decision to form the organization in the following terms :

The people of the subdivision (of Tamluk) have come to the clear conclusion that the heartless hypocrisy of official relief or even the most sincere efforts of the non-official organizations will not be able to save them from the impending calamities of severe famine and devastating epidemic. But complete lawlessness and barbaric repression will continue unabated. Consequently within a short period of time this region will turn into a vast graveyard—not a single man will be spared ... The people of Tamluk should try to do everything within their power in the final attempt to live in freedom by ending this state of chaos and lawlessness and by establishing peace and order.<sup>118</sup>

With this purpose in view the Tamluk War Council decided on 14 December 1942 to establish Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar (Tamralipta National Government) as a component of the future

Mahabharatiya Juktarashtra (All-India Federal State). Accordingly the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk was inaugurated on 17 December 1942. Satishchandra Samanta, a veteran leader, was installed as the first *sarbadhinayak* (dictator) of the Jatiya Sarkar.

The Jatiya Sarkar reorganized the trained volunteer corps hitherto divided between the different *thanas*, by combining them into a single force called *Bidyut Bahini* after the name of the Mahishadal corps and by setting up a central command under Susilkumar Dhara. On 26 January 1943 the Jatiya Sarkar declared the combined Bahini as the National Militia; Susil Dhara was installed as the Commandar-in-Chief of the Bahini with each *thana* command placed under a Ground Officer Commanding. On the same day, *thana* level constituents of the Jatiya Sarkar were formed in Tamluk, Mahishadal, Nandigram and Sutahata. A little later the Jatiya Sarkar machinery was extended to the level of the Union. Swaraj Panchayats were established in the Unions for conducting administration at the village level.

It was the combination of the excellent civil and military organization of the Jatiya Sarkar and the firm determination of the people which accounts for the continuity of the revolt in Tamluk till September 1944. The Jatiya Sarkar fought against heavy odds. It was required to resist the repression of the government forces, protect the people from the effects of the cyclone and tidal bore as well as the great famine of 1943, and keep up the morale of the people. All this was done with meagre resources, collected in the main locally and partly received from the central directorate of the Quit India Movement through the agency of Annadaprasad Chowdhuri who supplied money to both Kanthi and Tamluk.

Till March 1943, the Jatiya Sarkar is reported to have been expanding its activities openly. New camps and national courts were established in February and March 1943. However by March, government repression had driven the Jatiya Sarkar underground. This gave the government some leverage even in the remote villages. Noticing the improvement, the government started pulling out the military from Tamluk: the last troops were withdrawn in May 1943. Between May and July 1943 the position of the government continued to improve. By July the rebellion is said to have been confined to Mahishadal *thana* area only. Most of the front-ranking leaders were arrested between March and July 1943. They included Satischandra Samanta, Ajay Mukhopadhyay, the dictator of the Jatiya Sarkar after Satis Samanta's arrest, Susil Dhara, Nilmani Hazra, the dictator of the Mahishadal *thana* and Janardan Hazra, General Officer Commanding of Sutahata.

The situation changed again after July 1943, when Susil Dhara



was released on town bail and promptly absconded. Ajay Mukhopadhyay was replaced by Satishchandra Sahu who became the third dictator. These men rejuvenated the Jatiya Sarkar's activities. The police was, without doubt, getting some persons to help them in the interior. But the Jatiya Sarkar continued to carry on its administration and enforce its rules despite the presence of the police. For some time there was a tug-of-war between the police and the Jatiya Sarkar with one and then the other gaining the upper hand. Till the end of July the position of the government appeared to be stronger. After Susil Dhara absconded in July, the activities of the Jatiya Sarkar expanded to an appreciable extent. In the second half of August the government forces claimed to have checked the growth of the Jatiya Sarkar. But by November 1943, the Jatiya Sarkar appeared to have recovered its position. In January 1944, the government considered the situation in Tamluk to be 'unsatisfactory'<sup>119</sup> and in July 1944 the Jatiya Sarkar was said to pose a serious problem to the government. By this time, underground activities had been combined with overt acts of *satyagraha* against paddy and rice export in the main markets. In August 1944 Richard Casey, Governor of Bengal, informed the Viceroy Lord Wavell, that the government's position in Tamluk was 'still difficult': indeed there had been a further 'deterioration' and the Jatiya Sarkar continued to command considerable public sympathy. Casey felt that the situation in Tamluk was 'clearly intolerable'.<sup>120</sup>

It was in the month of August 1944 that the Jatiya Sarkar decided to wind up its activities in response to Gandhi's call to end the rebellion. Accordingly, the Jatiya Sarkar was disbanded on 1 September 1944. About this time the Swaraj Panchayat of Kanthi was also formally dissolved. All the leaders and workers who had run the national governments until that time, including Sushilkumar Dhara and Balailal Das Mahapatra, surrendered to the government. Yet the District Magistrate of Medinipur thought that the base of the Jatiya Sarkar remained intact: 'the main reason for the cessation of the Jatiya Sarkar activity is that it was disapproved of by Mr. Gandhi...the members of the Jatiya Sarkar will be just as prompt to put into effect a contrary policy if Mr. Gandhi changes his mind'.<sup>121</sup>

### **Parallel Nationalist Government in Tamluk and Kanthi**

Pulinbehari Sen, who commanded the militia in Khejuri, commented on the parallel administration set up by the Congress: 'We did all that government is supposed to do for the people'. The existence of the parallel governments was validated by popular

consent and co-operation. The governments tried to provide the people with an alternative administration when the British government had collapsed and was reduced to extravagant repressive measures in an attempt to re-establish its authority.

The activities of the national governments were organized in different departments, namely, defence or war, finance, revenue, home, police, external affairs, judiciary, health, education, agriculture and publicity. The charge of the departments were held by ministers who constituted the cabinet of the dictator, the head of the national government.<sup>122</sup> The arrangement was repeated at the *thana*-level national administration which remained below the central organization at the sub-division level.<sup>123</sup> In Tamluk the *thana*-level Jatiya Sarkars, which were established after the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar and were strongly entrenched, may have been conceived as autonomous units. But in practice the central organization exercised a certain degree of direct control, particularly in Sutamata, Mahishadal and Tamluk, through the central command of the Bidyut Bahini, which was the main source of strength of the national government system in Tamluk.

In Kanthi, the central organization of the Swaraj Panchayat operated more as an advisory and co-ordinating body. Unlike the Tamluk case, the central organization of Kanthi was established after the *thana*-level national governments had started functioning with their own particular arrangements. In Khejuri the parallel government was established under the name of the Khejuri *sadharantantra* (republic) headed by a president who was helped by a council of ministers.<sup>124</sup> A similar arrangement was made in Bhagabanpur. Initially, the parallel administration of Pataspur was designed after the British district administrative system. Later the Pataspur leaders switched over to the general pattern of the national government organization composed of a dictator or president and a council of ministers.<sup>125</sup> In early November 1942 the Kanthi War Council converted itself into a Swaraj Panchayat.<sup>126</sup> Then the *thana*-level national governments came under the purview of the Swaraj Panchayat. The *thana*-level organizations received from the Swaraj Panchayat instructions and advice in matters of general policy, as well as financial assistance, and functioned under its general supervision.<sup>127</sup> However, the Swaraj Panchayat commanded a militia called Mukti Bahini or Jatiya Bahini led by Balailal Das Mahapatra which conducted actions and organized certain executive and judicial activities in different parts of Kanthi. After the decline of the *thana*-level parallel administration, the Swaraj Panchayat carried on all the activities of the national government for the entire sub-division.

The parallel governments operated under conditions of great stress and were mostly occupied with the task of fighting the government forces and of protecting the people after the cyclone and during the famine. Both in Kanthi and Tamluk the national governments organized extensive relief work among the victims of cyclone and famine.<sup>128</sup> Relief work and resistance to government forces must have severely strained the resources of the national governments. Even under such conditions they tried to do constructive work. The Kanthi Swaraj Panchayat tried to reclaim waterlogged lands and to introduce co-operative farming.<sup>129</sup> Attempts were also made in Kanthi to popularize a barter economy and to restrict the circulation of money.<sup>130</sup> Charitable and Panchayati dispensaries were run in Kanthi.<sup>131</sup> The Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk is said to have spent Rs. 79,000 for public health and to provide protection against natural calamities. Many schools in Tamluk also received financial aid from the Jatiya Sarkar.<sup>132</sup>

Registration offices known as *Karbarnama Karjyalay* were set up in Khejuri<sup>133</sup> and Tamluk to deal with the sale and transfer of property.<sup>134</sup> The Tamluk Jatiya Sarkar ran its own postal system.<sup>135</sup>

The administration of justice was one of the major activities of the national governments. A two-tier judiciary called *Jatiya Adalat* or National Court, consisting of lower courts and a court of appeal, functioned in Tamluk. There were also tribunals to deal with special cases.<sup>136</sup> In Kanthi national court system was known as *Panchayati Dharmadhikaran*.<sup>137</sup> The local set-up of Khejuri consisted of three tiers. The *Janapad panchayat*, the lowest unit of the national government dealt with the cases within their respective jurisdictions. The *Mahal* (divisional) *Dharmadhikaran* and the *Kendriya* (Central) *Dharmadhikaran* were the successive courts of appeal.<sup>138</sup>

The national courts exercised both civil and criminal jurisdiction, trying cases of robbery, burglary and dacoity and also settling property disputes.<sup>139</sup> Like their relief and constructive activities, the national court system contributed towards the legitimacy of the national governments. But essentially the Jatiya Adalat functioned as a direct instrument of struggle. Spies who supplied intelligence to the government officials, guided the police into the countryside and identified the houses of the Congressmen, or the helpers of the police who participated in repression, were arrested and produced before the Jatiya Adalat. They were tried in the national courts for treason and were fined, sentenced to imprisonment or awarded corporal punishment. Many such cases are known to have occurred in both Tamluk and Kanthi.<sup>140</sup>

Understandably, peaceful activities constituted only a minor part of the programme of the national governments. The need to fight the government forces and to protect the people under conditions surcharged with great tension called for militant programmes. These programmes brought the national governments into confrontation with certain local forces as well. As early as September 1942 the Tamruk War Council clashed with the Mahishadal Raj, the largest *zamindari* estate in eastern Medinipur. A guard of one of the proprietors of the Raj had fired upon the people raiding the Mahishadal *thana*. The Raj family is known to have lent the services of this man to the *thana* officials and had sent a large supply of cartridges to them on 29 September.<sup>141</sup> On the next day, the office of the Raj in Reyapara (Nandigram) was ransacked and the employees driven away.<sup>142</sup> The Raja of Mahishadal circulated a printed appeal asking for forgiveness.<sup>143</sup> The appeal went unheeded. Then the Jatiya Sarkar asked the people to stop the payment of rent and taxes.<sup>144</sup> Attempts to prevent rent collection were also made. On several occasions, *zamindari* employees were attacked and fined for trying to collect rent and papers relating to rent were destroyed. Several *zamindari* offices were attacked and damaged.<sup>145</sup>

Shortage of food supplies was one of the major concerns of the Congress in Tamruk and Kanthi after 1941. The problem became much more acute and the fear of famine deepened after cyclone and tidal bore in October 1942. The national governments made all-out efforts to prevent the export of paddy and rice, to control the price of grains and to distribute grains among the people. Organizations were set up to cordon off different areas and volunteers did the rounds to stop procurement and export. The local villagers were also called upon to prevent procurement and export.<sup>146</sup>

Apprehending famine the Kanthi Swaraj Panchayat resolved in the middle of March 1943 to stop the sale of grains and announced a Congress ban on the export of grains.<sup>147</sup> In Khejuri an order was issued to the merchants to sell grain at prices fixed by the national government. This order seems to have been in keeping with the general policy of the Kanthi Swaraj Panchayat which tried to use peaceful means, such as appeals or *satyagraha* to get the merchants and hoarders to sell paddy between Rs. 6 and 7 per maund (1 maund=37.32 kilogrammes).<sup>148</sup> Such efforts were backed by positive threats of raid and loot, which began in November 1942 when the stock of Achintya Sasmal, and Meheruddin, the two large landowners of Kanthi, and of several other landowners of the sub-division were looted. An employee of Sasmal was killed when

he tried to prevent the looting. The methods of intimidation continued to be used throughout 1943. The houses of the landowners and stockists were raided and they were compelled to sell rice at low prices.<sup>149</sup>

The *thana Jatiya Sarkar* of Nandigram issued instructions to the merchants not to export rice or to sell paddy and rice in the market.<sup>150</sup> In Tamluk the merchants who tried to sell grains to the procurement agents were threatened. The Jatiya Sarkar ordered seizure of their stocks and distribution of the stocks among the people. In some cases such merchants were punished with heavy fines.<sup>151</sup> Paddy looting is also reported to have been encouraged by the national governments, and actually occurred both in Kanthi and Tamluk.<sup>152</sup> After March 1944 the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk also launched an open *satyagraha* against procurement and export.<sup>153</sup>

Methods of intimidation and coercion were used much more extensively in Tamluk than in Kanthi. Molestation of government employees and of government loyalists had become a common phenomenon in the areas under the influence of the Jatiya Sarkar.<sup>154</sup> Voluntary contributions towards the funds of the Jatiya Sarkar were usually available. But since the amount of such contributions was inadequate, the Jatiya Sarkar functionaries collected money and grains by force. Notices were served on the rich persons, namely, *zamindars*, *jotdars* and merchants demanding money and grains. Sometimes the demand is known to have been as high as 500 maunds of rice or Rs. 40,000 in cash. Refusal to meet these demands almost invariably led to intimidation, harassment, or arrest and detention, and even holding to ransom. Heavy fines ranging between Rs. 1,000 and 2,000 were imposed on those merchants who refused to comply with such orders.<sup>155</sup>

Far more drastic methods were adopted in dealing with government spies and helpers of police who often participated in arson, loot and rape. Serious offenders were not always produced before the Jatiya Adalat, but sometimes dealt with summarily by the militia. Their houses were looted, they were kidnapped, detained and in many cases physically liquidated.<sup>156</sup>

### Retrospect

Apparently the Jatiya Sarkar had taken to terrorism. Terrorism by an underground organization is fraught with the danger of centralization of power, and this appears to have happened with the Jatiya Sarkar of Tamluk. The operations of the Bidyut Bahini had overshadowed all other activities of the Jatiya Sarkar. Most of the news in the *Biplabi* related to the actions of the Bidyut Bahini. The national courts and the jails of the Jatiya Sarkar had

practically become parts of the Bidyut Bahini's structure. Naturally Susil Kumar Dhara, the chief commander of the militia, had become the focus of the Jatiya Sarkar. The terrorism of the Bidyut Bahini had also encouraged other people to undertake terrorist actions on their own initiative without reference to the Bahini.<sup>157</sup>

The terrorism of the Jatiya Sarkar and of the common people must, however, be seen against the circumstances in which it developed. The Jatiya Sarkar was constrained to maintain an extensive underground organization to fight the government forces which commanded very much greater resources and power. The savage repression unleashed by the government's forces, in the midst of the cyclone devastation and the fear of impending scarcity, led the people to launch a determined and desperate struggle against the government. For the people of eastern Medinipur, this was a basic struggle for survival and human dignity.

The sentiments of the people were articulated in an editorial in the *Biplabi* in the wake of the great famine of 1943:

During the last three months the problem of food has assumed dangerous proportions. The price of rice has risen one and half times. In some places rice is sold at Rs. 50/- per maund. Having procured rice from us at the rate of Rs. 3/- per maund they are selling it to us at the rate of Rs. 50/-. Is it not your duty, your sacred task to destroy this rule of the dacoits, of this Satanic exploitation? Otherwise we have no chance of survival. The demon has been sucking us pale. They then will consume our flesh and bones. Beware! Destroy it immediately.<sup>158</sup>

Referring to the large scale rape of women by government forces and their collaborators, the *Biplabi* exhorted the women to take up arms and to stand up together 'to hit (the offenders) with all the forces at your command. If some of the brutes die as a result of your attack, never mind'.<sup>159</sup>

It is the severity of the repression that had blurred the distinction between the non-violent and violent methods of achieving the right of self-determination. Even some of the veterans of the *satyagraha* of the 1930s had extended unconditional support to the Jatiya Sarkar. Thus Abani Giri of Nandigram observed that under the circumstances, 'The question of violence and non-violence became irrelevant. I supported (the methods of) the Jatiya Sarkar for the freedom of the country'.<sup>160</sup> This was also the feeling of Satischandra Khatua of Priyanagar, Nandigram: 'The repression

was insufferable. There were many spies around. In view of all this, I felt that if violence is necessary in the greater interest, I would not object to it'.<sup>161</sup> Sudhirranjan Mandal of Amratala, Nandigram, thought that the Jatiya Sarkar 'was indispensable for carrying on the struggle initiated by Gandhi..... We were not troubled by such questions as to whether murder is a valid or desirable means. All that we wanted was the freedom of the country. Every means was valid to that end. (I felt at that time that) freedom cannot be achieved only by non-violent methods'.<sup>162</sup>

The numerous incidents of rape had roused to frenzied anger even such ardent believers in non-violence as Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara in Nandigram and Gunadhar Mandal of Khodambari in the same *thana*. At the early stage of the movement, Rabindranath Giri had tried to dissuade the students of Nandigram, who controlled the local Bidyut Bahini, from aggressive actions. He participated in the movement under the pressure of circumstances, as it were. But his attitude drastically changed when the young wife of one of his younger brothers was raped in his own house. Referring to this incident Rabi Giri recalled :

Some men had committed such atrocities as cannot be mentioned. In those days some persons of our own villages tortured us in such a manner as even the police would not do. Those who worked as spies did not hesitate to molest the women. We were convinced that if we were to achieve our goal, then these men would have to be eliminated.... Today there is no difficulty in saying (certain things).... Even taking the blood of a chicken pains me. (But) during those days I did not hesitate to take human blood with my own hand.<sup>163</sup>

Gunadhar Mandal was more forthright :

(The) August Movement (in Tamluk) was not violent, it was non-violent. Such torture! People were starving, there was no medicine, mothers were abandoning their children, the Englishmen were taking away all the food from the country..... In my own small way I feel that if I am to set up a garden, then I will have to uproot the weed. It was a fight against the Englishmen. They have been ruining (our country), looting (our belongings) and violating our mothers. They have not spared anything. In that case what is our duty? Now one of my brothers [meaning countrymen] has been spying for them. In order to subdue him, to eliminate those sinners, we punish him.... I was in charge of the camp in the *thana* Congress office. I was not in the Bidyut Bahini.... Yet

I was compelled to go to such lengths as to redden my hands with human blood.... Listen, it was the circumstances (prevailing at that time) that had driven (me to that level). How? If these spies get a girl raped by the police on the bed of her dying father-in-law—look, after all we are human beings, how far are we to tolerate things?<sup>164</sup>

Evidently the militancy and the aggressiveness of the Jatiya Sarkar had an extensive social base. The Jatiya Sarkar was the organizational manifestation of the desperate mood of the people and their firm determination 'to fight to the finish'. The mood is clear in what Gunadhar Mandal said. Gunadhar Mandal, uneducated in the conventional sense of the term (he worked as a sharecropper and a wage labourer because his own holding was less than an acre), spoke for the entire population of Tamluk. Gunadhar Mandal's words sound very much like those of Gandhi when he said, 'In this struggle every risk has to be run to cure ourselves of the biggest disease - a disease which has sapped our manhood and almost made us feel as if we must for ever be slaves. It is an insufferable thing'.<sup>165</sup>

The terrorism of the Jatiya Sarkar led to the combination of several local forces against the movement. Initially only a few groups of government supporters and loyalists actively opposed the movement. The rest of the people either supported it or remained non-committal. But the situation began to change with the increase of such activities as forcible collection of funds, control on trade and price of grains, encouragement to loot granaries, seizure of rice or paddy stocks and distribution of the seized grains among the people, and obstruction to rent collection. These activities gradually turned the most influential section of the society, namely, the *jotdars*, *zamindars* and merchants, hostile to the movement. Some of the local professionals, such as school teachers and lawyers also appear to have turned against the movement. To these may be added the relatives of those who were physically liquidated or were made to suffer heavy corporal punishment, such as blinding or the severing or mutilation of limbs. Besides, there were the die-hard followers of non-violence who refused to accept the new forms of the Quit India Movement. The terrorism of the Jatiya Sarkar enraged them. A section of the orthodox believers in non-violence had joined the movement under the pressure of circumstances.<sup>166</sup> Another section of this group kept themselves away from the movement, but preferred not to oppose it overtly.<sup>167</sup> By May 1944, the latter group came out openly to condemn the Jatiya Sarkar.<sup>168</sup>



The inner contradictions of the broad front of the Congress had begun to come out into the open as early as 1922, when the *bhagchashi* movement began in Kanthi. During the 1930s the contradictions developed into a clear rift in the Congress broad front under the impact of the growing agrarian agitations which were inspired by the experience of the mass movements. The broad front tended to collapse as a result of the developments between 1942 and 1944. The *jotdars*, *zamindars* and merchants had become positively hostile to the Congress. The national governments had begun to incite the people against these elements. Many Congress leaders and workers who believed in the broad front strategy, such as Satischandra Sahu, Hrishikesh Gayen, Bhimacharan Patra, Rabindranath Giri, had actively participated in the movement. Only a few die-hards stuck to the logic of broad front and stayed away from the movement apparently owing to their commitment to non-violence.

The collapse of the broad front is clearly indicated in some of the editorial comments of the *Biplabi* and the *Swadhin Bharat*, the spokesman of the Quit India Movement in Kanthi. The *Biplabi* called upon the people to confiscate the surplus stock of those richmen who will try to sell paddy without caring for the resistance by the villagers and to distribute it among the hungry. This is not dacoity, nor is it a social crime, it is not a sin from a religious point of view either. Today this is the prime duty of every human being.<sup>169</sup> The *Swadhin Bharat* considered paddy looting a sinful act but it blamed the stockists who were holding on to excessive stocks for this sin.<sup>170</sup> The paper asked the people to undertake *satyagraha* in the houses of the hoarders in order to make them sell paddy at the rates suggested by it. Explaining the rationale of the *satyagraha*, the *Swadhin Bharat* observed :

As the needs of the people require it, every individual should have a right on all resources. But a class of men are amassing fortunes by depriving millions of men of their just rights. It is you who fill their granaries by your labour. But whenever there is distress (these richmen) sell the stock in those granaries to you at high prices and then they harm you by purchasing your lands and houses.<sup>171</sup>

The attitude of the *Swadhin Bharat* hardened later. It called upon the people to resist exploitation by force. In an editorial entitled 'The Demand for Survival', the *Swadhin Bharat* observed that it was absolutely necessary that each village should have a sufficient stock of paddy to meet the needs of its inhabitants.

If anybody tries to lay hands on this stock, (you should consider) it to be unjust, it is hand of oppression, it is the hand of sin. (You would) better die in resisting the oppression than being forced to die little by little in hunger. Such a resistance is a virtuous act. You will suffer less if you die in resisting oppression.<sup>172</sup>

Almost in the same vein the *Biplabi* called upon the people to 'fight to the finish':

If you cannot prevent death, then why should you die ignobly in hunger. Let us stand up heroically to face bullets so that we can immerse the satanic (British) rule in the ocean. Everyone will die in famine, but how many persons can be killed by bullets? Those who will be killed by bullets will receive the exalted position due to the heroes, and those who survive will live happily in independent Tamralipta: they will get enough food and clothing.... The British rulers have completely devastated this prosperous country. Now these robbers have sent down their men to take away the crops that you have cultivated with great trouble. Think for a while whether that is desirable or (whether) it will be better to drive the Satan away in order to live in freedom and to enjoy the fruits of your labour.<sup>173</sup>

Apparently the people of Tamluk and Kanthi were fighting a desperate struggle on two fronts: against the British government on the one side, and internal adversaries on the other. The dynamics of a mass movement for self-determination led the people to confront simultaneously the forces of the British government and the upper strata of the local society. In this situation, the people of Tamluk and Kanthi fought what Gandhi described as a heroic and glorious struggle. Gandhi had visited Mahishadal between 25 and 30 December 1945 in order to acquaint himself with the happenings in Tamluk during the Quit India Movement particularly the activities of the Jatiya Sarkar about which he had received many complaints both from government circles and the orthodox followers of non-violence. He made a detailed study of the events in Tamluk during the movement including the cases of raping of the women by the government forces and the cases of corporal punishment inflicted by the Jatiya Sarkar. In his last prayer meeting in Mahishadal, Gandhi publicly referred to the subject, 'I wonder how I personally would have reacted to what the British have done here.

What you have done is heroic and glorious. However you have deviated from the path of non-violence.'<sup>174</sup>

The struggle which the people of Tamluk and Kanthi had fought was an unequal struggle, fought in almost complete isolation. The combined strength of the government and the upper strata of the society was tremendous. One wonders how many people in India, or for that matter in Bengal, were concerned about the struggle and the sufferings of the people of Tamluk and Kanthi. The government was alarmed by the rebellion of the people of Tamluk and Kanthi. But this rebellion does not appear to have produced any significant impression on nationalist circles in Calcutta. No help, except for the modest funds supplied by the central directorate of the Quit India Movement and some relief materials sent by a few social service organizations, was available to the nationalist rebels of Tamluk and Kanthi. The inexorable logic of fighting an unequal struggle in isolation led to centralization of power. The centralization had the consent of the people, but by its own logic the new power tended to absorb into its system the power which the people had acquired in the course of the previous movements. The compulsions of the movement, the circumstances which threatened the very existence and the honour of the people, prompted the latter to vest their power in the centralized authority of the national government. For all practical purposes the national government in Tamluk and Kanthi behaved like a counter-state and ultimately became the sole custodian of the power of the people. In the Gandhian parlance, it became a violent organization.

The Quit India Movement, as conceived by Gandhi, was not a peaceful *satyagraha* which involved restraint and self-suffering on the part of the participants. It was an open revolt in which the masses, rather than the leaders and trained volunteers of the Congress, were to take the initiative. The people were in a militant and desperate mood. Although most of the Congress leaders were arrested within a few days after 8 August, mass action began simultaneously in widely separated places. In most places students were in the forefront of the mass actions and peasants took a prominent part in them. Most of these activists were newcomers. Yet, as the government documents show, there was a marked similarity between the incidents reported from the different parts of the country between the Punjab and Kerala, and between Assam and Gujarat. Commenting on the all-India pattern of the movement, Tottenham observed,

What might be called the ordinary manifestations of mob violence were ... there were no communal clashes—and the

whole picture was much more one of calculated venom directed against selected objectives than of indignant people hitting out indiscriminately at the nearest object in blind resentment at the arrest of the leaders.<sup>175</sup>

If non-violence is understood in the narrow sense of abstention from the use of physical force the Quit India Movement was certainly not non-violent. In the broader socio-political sense, non-violence means decentralization of power. It is in this sense that Gandhi developed the concept of non-violence. Even in this sense the Quit India Movement ceased to be non-violent in the areas where it was more organized, as in Tamluk and Kanthi in Medinipur, Talcher in Orissa or Satara in Maharashtra and a few pockets in U.P. and Bihar. There are reasons to believe that Gandhi did anticipate that the Quit India Movement might take a violent turn and could even lead to internecine struggles. Gandhi was prepared to bear with these. The reason for this desperate attitude of Gandhi, as Wickenden pointed out in his report, 'is found in Gandhi's vehement opposition to cowardice, his detestation of India's servility and his inability to recommend non-violence as the only way to meet the immediate and great evil with which the country was faced and whose eradication could brook of no delay.'<sup>176</sup>

Gandhi was, no doubt, in an unusually militant mood. But at no stage did he forsake his faith in non-violence. He would have liked the movement to be a non-violent one but was prepared to run the risk of unrestricted mass action even if that meant civil war. To him this was to be a passing phase only.

Let them entrust India to God or, in modern parlance, to anarchy. Then all parties will fight one another like dogs, or will, when real responsibility faces them, come to reasonable agreement. I shall expect non-violence to arise out of the chaos.<sup>177</sup>

Ever since he thought of the idea of the Quit India Movement, Gandhi had consistently evoked the power of the masses as the main force in the movement. 'What I am hoping and striving for', Gandhi declared, 'is an irresistible mass urge on the part of the people'.<sup>178</sup> Gandhi, no doubt, forced the Congress to participate in the movement but did not envisage Congress control on it. The dynamism of the movement should be generated by the participation of the people. '(With the arrest of the leaders) it should gain strength if it has any vitality'.<sup>179</sup>

The inherent vitality of the mass urge of the people to put an

end to British rule was the main source of strength of the Quit India Movement in Tamluk and Kanthi. Most of the veteran leaders of Kanthi were arrested before the movement began there. In Tamluk the movement went on unabated even after the arrest of the senior leaders like Satischandra Samanta and Ajaykumar Mukhopadhyay who were the first two *sarbadhinayak* (dictator) of the Jatiya Sarkar. The movement had thrown up new leaders and organisers who were little or unknown as political activists before the beginning of the movement. Some of these leaders had belonged to the Congress or the Forward Bloc or the Congress Socialist Party or the Communist Party of India before the movement, but the student and youth organizers who played a vital role in the Quit India Movement of Tamluk and Kanthi had no previous experience as political workers. As a matter of fact the Quit India Movement of Tamluk and Kanthi had outgrown the Congress and for that matter all other political parties. The veterans of the past *satyagrahas* had submitted to the newly emerging force which represented the mood and aspirations of the common people.

Gandhi's direct appeal to the people to rise in open revolt had a definite ideological bearing. This is indicated by his speech on the Quit India resolution at the All India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay. In course of the speech Gandhi said

When I raised the slogan of 'Quit India' people in India who were feeling despondent felt that I had placed before them a new thing. If you want real democracy you will have to come together and such coming together will create a true democracy.... My democracy means that everyone is his own master.<sup>180</sup>

This is the essence of *swaraj* in a non-violent society which Gandhi was striving to establish in India through constructive work and mass movements. Chaos and even internecine struggle might follow from open rebellion which was meant for destroying the authority of the government. If the people were conscious of their responsibilities and rights as free individuals, they would be able to overcome the ordeal and come together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect for establishing a non-violent society.

In course of the same Gandhi observed :

I know we have not done much by way of non-violence and therefore, if such a change comes about, I will take it as a

result of our labours during the last 22 years and God has helped us to achieve it.<sup>181</sup>

It appears that Gandhi was banking upon the political consciousness of the people and the determination to resist oppression which they had acquired through the experience of the struggle both at the national and local levels since 1921.

The upsurge of the people in the Quit India Movement showed that a tremendous mass force for political action had developed in the country. The upsurge had shaken the foundations of British rule in India. On the other hand, it had demonstrated the capacity of the people to initiate mass action without the direct guidance of the acknowledged political leaders. Apparently the people had developed the capacity to act on their own. These mass actions, as pointed out by the government document prepared by Tottenham, displayed certain signs of political maturity. The continuity of the movement under extremely adverse conditions had led to its transformation into a centralized power with terrorist tendencies, at least in the case of the national government organisations in Tamluk and Kanthi. In these cases the exigencies of the situation prompted the people to authorize the national government to act for them. In a non-violent struggle, such centralisation of power should only be a temporary phenomenon, because the people will resume the power which they had voluntarily vested in the central organisation. The crucial thing is the determination of the people to continue the struggle for decentralisation of power and to protect their rights as free individuals.

In the Quit India Movement the will and the strength of the people to resist authority and establish their rights were put to a severe test. The developments of mass action during the movement show that the people rose to the occasion. They had made an advance towards the goal. Further struggles had to be fought for the achievement of *swaraj*. But these struggles were not launched at that time or later.

### Notes

1. See *Harijan* between March and August 1942, particularly from the last week of April 1942.
2. *Harijan*, 15 March 1942 and 29 March 1942.
3. See T. Wickenden, 'Report on the Disturbances of 1942-43' in P. N. Chopra (ed), *Quit India Movement: British Secret Report* (Faridabad, 1976), pp. 64-5, 193-205.
4. *Ibid*, p. 91-112; R. Tottenham, 'Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances 1942-43', in *Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1942 (Calcutta, 1944), Chapter III and appendix IV.

5. *Ibid*, appendix V; Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-3.
6. *Ibid*, p. 93.
7. Tottenham, *op. cit.*, Chapter III and appendix IV, V.
8. For a detailed account of the central organisation, see Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-141.
9. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi, 1983), p. 391.
10. Tottenham, *op. cit.*, Chapter II.
11. *Harijan*, 26 April 1942.
12. *Harijan*, 19 April 1942; Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
13. *Harijan*, 24 May 1942 and 18 July 1942.
14. *Harijan*, 26 April 1942.
15. *Harijan*, 10 May 1942 and 31 May 1942.
16. *Harijan*, 31 May 1942.
17. B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929-1942* (London, 1976), p. 143
18. *Ibid*, pp. 149-50.
19. M. S. Venkataramani and B. K. Shrivastava, *Quit India: The American Response to the 1942 Struggle* (Delhi, 1979), pp. 146-48.
20. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
21. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (New Delhi, 1959), p. 68.
22. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.
23. Herbert to Linlithgow, 6 January 1940, L/P and J/5/145, India Office Records (henceforth IOR).
24. Venkataramani and Shrivastava, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-56.
25. Gandhi, quoted in a letter from Sharaf Ather Ali to P.C. Joshi, 17 May 1942, cited in Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
26. Confidential Report on the Political Situation of Bengal from the Governor to the Viceroy (also known as Fortnightly Report, henceforth FR) for the First Half of August 1942.
27. Gopinandan Goswami, *Banglar Haldighat Tamruk* (Tajpur, Medinipur, 1973), p. 78.
28. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-73, 193-205; Azad, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-71.
29. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31.
30. Tottenham, *op. cit.*, Chapter III.
31. *Biplabi*, no.45 (15 September 1943).
32. *Biplabi*, no.51 (5 July 1943).
33. *Harijan*, 7 June 1942.
34. Saugata Mukherjee, 'Agrarian Class Formation in Modern Bengal, 1931-51', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, no.4 (January, 1986) pp. PE11-18.'
35. FR, Second Half of June 1938 (hereafter this series is cited as FR 2 June 1938; FR 1 March 1939 etc.); FR 2 January 1939; FR 2 February 1939; FR 1 and 2 March 1939; FR 1 and 2 April 1939; FR 2 June 1939.
36. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 18 November 1938, L/P and J/5/143, IOR.
37. FR 2 June 1938; FR 2 January 1939; FR 1 April 1939.
38. FR 2 January 1942.
39. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 391-92.
40. FR 2 June 1942.
41. FR 2 April 1942; FR 1 June 1942.
42. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4.
43. *Ibid*, p. 61.
44. *Ibid*, p. 63.
45. Interview with Rajanikanta Mandal, Shaik Abdul, Banbehari Mandal, Kagalchandra Mandal, Niranjan Mandal of Uttar Amtaliya, Nagendranath Das, Narendranath Manna, Sudhirchandra Manna and Sarbeswar Maiti of

- Uttar Dihi Mukundapur, Upendranath Jana of Ajaya, Prasannakumar Tripathi of Pania-Saradabar, Basantakumar Das of Kanthi town (all places in Kanthi); Birajmohan Das of Uttar Barh Hingli, Mathuranath Pramanik of Dwariberya, Asutosh Jana, Patitpaban Jana of Lakhya-Tyangrakhali, Krishnapada Bera of Gokulnagar, Bhagbatchandra Pradhan of Chandannagar, Atulkrishna Maiti of Mahammadpur, Satischandra Khatua of Priyanagar, Balam Giri of Bhekutia and Nirmalkumar Khatua of Kalicharanpur (all places in Tamluk); A. K. Jameson, *Final Report of the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Midnapore 1911 to 1917* (Calcutta, 1918), pp. 68. 111; *Nihar* (a local weekly of Kanthi), 7 March 1922, 12 May and 26 May 1931.
46. Interview with Bansidhar Samanta of Gathra, Saratchandra Jana of Banpur, Akhilchandra Bhowmik of Chitra and Rameschandra Kar of Abasbari (all places in Tamluk).
  47. For details of the movement against Union Board, see Hitesranjan Sanyal, 'Dakshinpaschim Banglay Jatiyatabadi Andolan', *Chaturanga*, 38 year. Kartic-Poush 1383 Bengali Sal (henceforth BS), pp. 191-203 and Hitesranjan Sanyal, 'Congress Movements in the Villages of Eastern Midnapore' in *Asie du Sud: Traditions et changements*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, N. 582 (Paris, 1979), pp. 172-74.
  48. *Nihar*, 7 March, 1922.
  49. For details, see Sanyal (1979), *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76.
  50. Interview with Gobinda Dinda of Nimdasbar (Kanthi).
  51. *Nihar*, 26 May 1931.
  52. *Nihar*, 12 and 26 May 1931; Basantakumar Das, *Midinipure Swadhinatar Ganasangram: Khejuri Thana* (Ajanbari, Medinipur, 1975), pp. 26-7.
  53. For the spread of *bhagchashi* movement between 1932-34, interview with Prasannakumar Tripathi of Pania Saradabar (Kanthi), Birajmohan Das, Uttarbarh-Hingli (Tamluk).
  54. For no-rent campaign, interview with Taraknath Jana of Putputia (Tamluk).
  55. Interview with Hrishikes Gayen of Bayenda (Kanthi), Basantakumar Das, Rasbehari Pal, Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town, Upendranath Jana of Ajaya (Kanthi), Satischandra Sau of Khodambari, Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara, Krishnapada Bera of Gokulnagar, Bhagbatchandra Pradhan of Chandannagar, Atulkrishna Maiti of Mahammadpur, Satischandra Khatua of Priyanagar, Balam Giri of Bhekutia, Nirmalkumar Khatua of Kalicharanpur (all places in Tamluk); FR 2 July 1939; FR 1 August 1939; FR 1 December 1939; FR 2 December 1939.
  56. Interview with Bansidhar Samanta of Gathra, Saratchandra Jana of Banpur, Tarakchandra Jana of Putputia, Ganeshchandra Thandar of Chathra, Akhilchandra Bhowmik of Chitra and Rameschandra Kar of Abasbari (all places in Tamluk); FR 2 June 1938; FR 2 February 1939; FR 2 April 1939.
  57. Interview with Satischandra Sau of Khodambari (Tamluk), Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara (Tamluk), Basantakumar Das of Kanthi town, Sudhirchandra Das of Kanthi town and Hrishikes Gayen of Bayenda (Kanthi).
  58. Interviews as in n.56; FR 2 February 1939; FR 2 April 1939.
  59. Interview with Pulinbehari Sen of Tikasi (Kanthi).
  60. Satischandra Samanta, Syamadas Bhattacharyya, Anangamohan Das, Prahladkumar Pramanik, *August Revolution and Two Years' National Govt. in Midnapore* (Calcutta, 1946), p. 4.
  61. Interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town and Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara (Tamluk).
  62. Interview with Gopinandan Goswami of Gopalpur (Tamluk), Balailal Das Mahapatra.



63. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8; Das, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
64. Interview with Sudhansusekhar Bhowmik of Bhekutia (Tamluk), Bijaybasanta Chakravarti of Barasati (Tamluk) and Gopinandan Goswami; Tamralipta Swadhinata Sangram Itihas Committee, *Sangrami Purush Kumarchandra* (Tamluk, 1984), p. 100.
65. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.
66. *Ibid.*, P. 10; *Sangrami Purush Kumarchandra*, p. 100-1. Also interview with Sudhansusekhar Bhowmik, Gopinandan Goswami, Taraknath Jana of Putputia (Tamluk), Resbehari Pal of Kanti town, Sudhirchandra Manna and Narendranath Manna of Uttar Dihi Mukundapur (Kanthi) and Balilal Das Mahapatra.
67. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Susilkumar Dhara, *Prabaha* (Tamluk, 1389 BS), p. 107.
68. Government of Bengal, Home Dept., Political, *District Officers' Chronicles of Events: Disturbances Consequent Upon The All-India Congress Committee's Resolution of 8th August, 1942 and the Arrest of Congress Leaders Thereafter: August 1942 to Middle of March 1943* (henceforth DOC) (Alipore, Calcutta, 1943), p. 17.
69. Interview with Rasbehari Pal of Kanthi town and Gopinandan Goswami of Gopalpur (Tamluk).
70. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
71. Interview with Pulinbehari Sen of Tikasi (Kanthi), Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town, Naliniranjan Hota of Kalyanchak (Tamluk), Hansadwaj Maiti of Syamsundarpur (Tamluk) and Hrishikes Gayen of Bayenda (Kanthi); *Sangrami Purush Kumarchandra*, pp. 109-10.
72. Interview with Rasbehari Pal of Kanthi town.
73. Interview with Pulinbehari Sen of Tikasi (Kanthi).
74. As in n.73 above.
75. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 64-66; Basantakumar Das, *A Short History of the August Movement in the Contai Sub-Division, District Midnapore* (Contai, 1963), p. 3; *DOC*, p. 17; Dhara, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Hrishikes Gayen, *Swadhinata Sangrame Bhagabanpur Thana* (Bayenda, Medinipur, 1383 BS), pp. 31-32; interview with Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara Satischandra Sau of Khodambari, Sudhansusekhar Bhowmik of Bhekutia, Kunjabehari Bhakta Das of Dhanyasri, Aswini Adhikari of Reyapara, Priyalal Panda of Jayanpur (all places in Tamluk).
76. Interview with Rasbehari Pal of Kanthi town; *DOC*, p. 17.
77. Interview with Gopinandan Goswami of Gopalpur (Tamluk).
78. Interview with Tarakchandra Jana of Putputia (Tamluk).
79. Interview with Bansidhar Samanta of Gathra (Tamluk) and Rabindranath Mitra of Kespur (Sadar sub-division).
80. *DOC*, pp. 17-18; FR 2 July 1942; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; interview with Rasbehari Pal of Kanthi Town.
81. *DOC*, p. 18; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
83. *DOC*, p. 18.
84. *DOC*, p. 19; Das (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 3.
85. Interview with Rasbehari Pal of Kanthi town.
86. Interview with Rasbehari Pal and Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town; *DOC*, p. 17.
87. Interview with Rasbehari Pal, Balailal Das Mahapatra, and Kanganalchand Giri of Bahiri (Kanthi).
88. Interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra.
89. Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 66; interview with Rasbehari Pal and Balailal Das Mahapatra.

90. Dhara, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14; Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38.
91. Interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra, Sarbeswar Panda of Karanji (Kanthi), Bhimacharan Patra of Kunjapara (Kanthi).
92. FR 2 October, 1942.
93. Samanta *et. cit.*, pp. 11-12; *DOC*, p-18.
94. For the chronology of the incidents between 9 and 22 September, see *DOC*, p. 18 and Das (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 5-9; interview with Purna Raut of Mahisgoth (Kanthi) for details of the Sarsebari incident.
95. Dially Report (henceforth DR), 29 September 1942 in Governor's Secretariat (Bengal) papers (henceforth GSP), R/3/2/36, IOR.
96. *Loc. cit.*; *DOC*, p. 20; interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra and Sarbeswar Panda of Karanji.
97. *DOC*, p. 20.
98. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 18; Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 63; interview with Satischandra Sau of Khodambari (Tamluk).
99. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 18; Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 63.
100. The chronology of the movement has been reconstructed on the basis of the following sources.
  - (i) GSP: DR 29 September 1942 to 15 March 1943; Deputy Inspector General (DIG), Intelligence Branch (IB) to Inspector General (IG), 29 September 1942; N.M. Khan, District Magistrate (DM), Midnapore to Additional Secretary, Home, 30 September 1942; Report from S.G. Taylor, Superintendent of Police (SP), Midnapore to DIG, 1 October 1942; Note by Governor, 2 October 1942; M.M. Basu, Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Midnapore to J.R. Blair, Chief Secretary, 2 October 1942; Report from M.M. Basu, ADM, Midnapore, 2 October 1942; Report from IG, 2 October 1942; Report from DM, Midnapore, 3 October 1942; S.P. Midnapore to DM Midnapore, 3 October 1942; DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan Division, 4 October 1942; SP, Midnapore to IG, 4 October 1942; DM, Midnapore Commissioner, Burdwan, 5 October 1942; SP, Midnapore to IG, 5 October 1942; Note by IG, 7 October 1942; Report from Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), Tamluk, 10 October 1942; DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan, 10 October 1942 and 11 October 1942; from IG, 21 October 1942; SP, Midnapore to IG, 27 October 1942.
  - (ii) FR 1 and 2 October, November, December 1942, January, February, March, April, May 1943; FR 1 June 1943, FR 2 July 1943, FR 1 and 2 August 1943, FR 2 October 1943, FR 1 and 2 November 1943, FR 1 December 1943, FR 1 January 1944, FR 2 February 1944, FR 1 and 2 March 1944, FR 2 May 1944, FR 1 and 2 July 1944, FR 1 and 2 October 1944.
  - (iii) *DOC*, pp. 20-33.
  - (iv) Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 48-49; Das (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 9-33; Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 66-87; Dhara, *op. cit.*, p. 120-183; Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 39-53.
101. Report from M.M. Basu, ADM, Midnapore, 2 October, 1942, GSP.
102. N.M. Khan, DM, Midnapore to Additional Secretary, Home, Govt. of Bengal, 30 September 1942, GSP.
103. Note by J.A.H. Herbert, Governor, Bengal, 1 October 1942, GSP.
104. Taylor, SP, Midnapore to DM, Midnapore, 30 October 1942, GSP.
105. DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan Division, 5 October 1942, GSP.
106. ADM, Midnapore to J.R. Blair, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 2 October 1942, GSP.
107. *DOC*, p. 23.
108. SP, Midnapore to Gordon, IG, Bengal, 27 October 1942, GSP; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

109. SP, Midnapore to IG, 27 October 1942, GSP.
110. *Loc. cit.*
111. *Loc. cit.*
112. FR 2 September 1942; FR 1 April 1943; Report from District Intelligence Branch (DIB), Midnapore, 2 February 1943, GSP; DR, 4 February 1943, GSP.
113. FR 2 September 1942; FR 1 November 1943; FR 2 November 1943; interview with Taraknath Jana, Putputia (Tamluk).
114. DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan Division, 14 November 1942, GSP; DR, 24 November 1942, GSP; DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan, 5 February 1943, GSP; FR 2 September 1942.
115. *DOC*, p. 33; Dhara, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40; Gayen, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40; interview with Abinaschandra Manna, Ranichak (Kanthi).
116. SP, Midnapore to IG, 27 October 1942, GSP; Report by IG, 18 February 1943, GSP; Das (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 23-25; Das (1975), *op. cit.*, pp. 77-82.
117. Report by IG, 18 February 1943, GSP.
118. *Tamluke Nabajuger Abhyuday* (Leaflet announcing the establishment of National Government in Tamluk on 1 Poush 1349 BS, 17 December 1942), Custody Sudhansusekhar Bhowmik of Bhekutia (Tamluk).
119. FR 2 January 1944; FR 1 July 1944.
120. Casey to Wavell, 14 August 1944, L/P and J/5/151, IOR.
121. FR 1 October 1944.
122. Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 75; Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-40.
123. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4; Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
124. Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 74-5.
125. DR, 27 October 1942, GSP; interview with Prasanna Tripathi of Pania Saradabar (Kanthi).
126. Interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town.
127. Interview with Bhimacharan Patra of Kunjapara, Pulinbehari Sen of Tikasi, Balailal Das Mahapatra of Kanthi town, Prasanna Tripathi of Pania Sardabar and Abinaschandra Manna of Ranichak (all places in Kanthi).
128. SP, Midnapore to IG, 27 October 1942, GSP; DR, 12 February 1943, GSP; FR, First Half of April 1943; DR, 24 November 1943, GSP; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 39; interview with Balailal Das Mahapatra and Abha Maiti of Kanthi.
129. *Swadhin Bharat*, Spokesman of the Quit India Movement in Kanthi. 1 Magh 1349 BS and 18 Baisakh 1350 BS.
130. DR, 3 November 1942, GSP; DR, 11 December 1942, GSP; Report by S.N. Mitra, Additional S.P., District Intelligence Branch (DIB), Midnapore, 20 November 1942, GSP.
131. *Swadhin Bharat*, 16 Jaistha 1350 BS and 13 Ashar 1350 BS.
132. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 53; Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
133. Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 75.
134. Several documents registering sale and transfer of properties at the Jatiya Sarkar registration offices are preserved in the archives of the Janakalyan Trust in Parabatipur, Tamluk Town.
135. Samanta *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
136. DR, 4 March 1943, GSP; DIB, Midnapore, 3 January 1943, GSP, Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 53; FR 1 March 1943; FR 2 March 1943; FR 1 May 1943.
137. *Swadhin Bharat*, 1 Magh 1349 BS, 16 Jaistha 1350 BS and 12 Ashar 1350 BS.
138. Das (1975), *op. cit.*, p. 75.
139. FR 2 December 1942; FR 1 March 1944; *Swadhin Bharat*, 1 March 1349 BS and 20 Chaitra 1349 BS; *Biplabi*, no.26 (26 January 1943), no.29 (21 February

- 1943), no.37 (13 April 1943), no.44 (15 May 1943), no.45 (19 May 1943), no.53 (18 July 1943), no.64 (29 September 1943), no.68 (5 December 1943), Several copies of the judgements delivered at the Jatiya Adalat are preserved in the archives of the Janakalyan Trust in Parbatipur, Tamluk Town.
140. *Swadhin Bharat*, 20 Chaitra 1349 BS and 16 Jaistha 1350 BS; *Biplabi*, no.48 (7 June 1943), no.60 (31 August 1943); DR, 21 June 1943, GSP.
141. Report by M.M. Basu, ADM, Midnapore, 2 October 1942 GSP.
142. *Loc. cit.*
143. *DOC*, p. 26; DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan, 10 October 1942.
144. *Biplabi*, no.23 (2 January 1943); *Swadhin Bharat*, 27 Chaitra 1349 BS.
145. *DOC*, p.31; *Swadhin Bharat*, 1 Magh 1349 BS; *Biplabi*, no.23 (2 January 1943), no.35 (28 March 1943), no.62 (11 September 1943), no.69 (23 December 1943), no.72 (29 February 1944).
146. FR 1 February 1943; FR 1 March 1943; FR 2 March 1944; DR, 11 January 1943, GSP; *Biplabi* no.38 (14 April 1943) and no.62 (11 September 1943).
147. *Swadhin Bharat*, 10 Poush 1349 BS and 27 Chaitra 1349 BS; DIB report, 5 January 1943, GSP.
148. *Swadhin Bharat*, 4 Baisakh 1350 BS and 18 Baisakh 1350 BS.
149. *Swadhin Bharat*, 6 Chaitra 1349 BS and 23 Jaistha 1350 BS.
150. DIB report, 20 December 1942, GSP; *DOC*, p. 31.
151. FR 1 December 1943; FR Second Half of July 1944; *Biplabi*, no.57 (13 August 1943) and no.62 (11 September 1943).
152. FR 1 February 1943; *Swadhin Bharat*, 27 Chaitra 1349; *Biplabi*, no.56 (5 August 1943); *DOC*, pp. 27, 32.
153. *Biplabi*, no.73 (7 March 1943), 74 (23 March 1943) and no.75 (31 March 1943); DR, 27 November 1942, GSP.
154. DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan, 22 January 1943, GSP; *DOC*, pp. 29-33.
155. FR 2 March 1943; FR 2 July 1944; DR 17 December 1942, GSP; DR 21 January 1943, GSP; Dhara, *op.cit.*, p. 145-46; *DOC*, pp. 28, 29, 31.
156. DM, Midnapore to Commissioner, Burdwan, 5 February 1943 and 8 February 1943; FR 1 March 1943; FR 2 March 1943; FR 1 October 1943; FR 2 October 1943; *DOC*, p. 27-32; Dhara *op. cit.*, p. 139-42; interview with Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara, Kunjabehari Bhakta Das of Dhanyasri, Gopinandan Goswami of Gopalpur, Gunadhar Mandal of Khodambari (all places in Tamluk).
157. Interview with Satischandra Sau of Khodambari (Tamluk).
158. *Biplabi*, no.45 (15 May 1943).
159. *Biplabi* no.25 (25 January 1943).
160. Interview with Abani Gir.
161. Interview with Satischandra Khatua.
162. Interview with Sudhirranjan Mandal.
163. Interview with Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara (Tamluk).
164. Interview with Gunadhar Mandal.
165. *Harijan*, 31 May 1942.
166. Interview with Rabindranath Giri of Reyapara, Gunadhar Mandal of Khodambari (both places in Tamluk), Hrishikes Gayen of Bayenda (Kanthi).
167. Interview with Sudhansusekhar Bhowmik of Bhekutia, Naliniranjan Hota of Kalyanchak and Hansadwaj Dhara of Syamsundarpur (all places in Tamluk).
168. FR 2 May 1944.
169. *Biplabi*, no.62 (11 September 1943).
170. *Swadhin Bharat*, 27 Chaitra 1350 BS.
171. *Swadhin Bharat*, 11 Baisakh 1350 BS.
172. *Swadhin Bharat*, 5 December 1943.

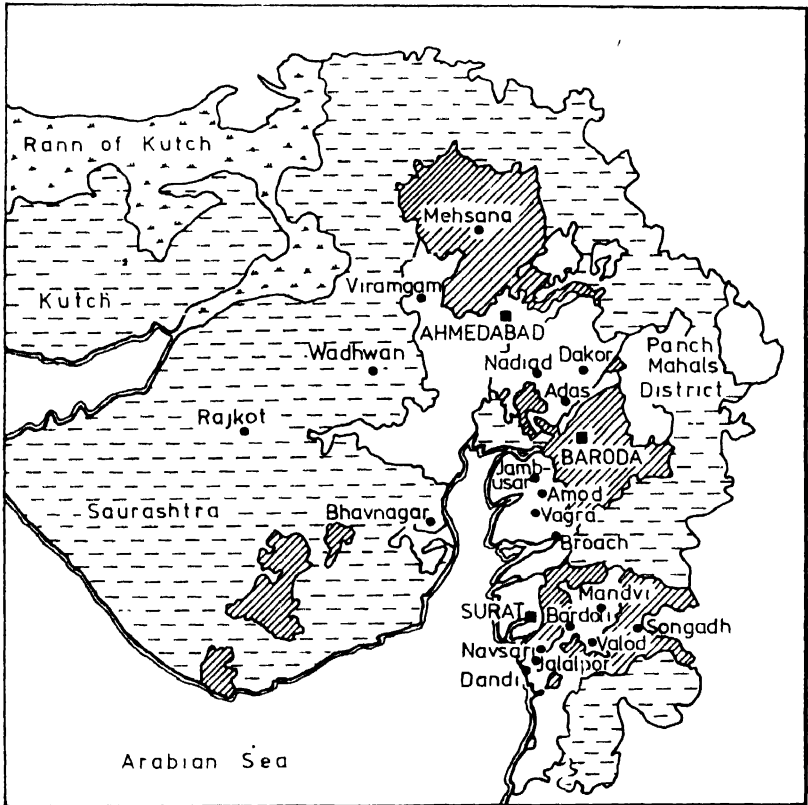
173. *Biplabi*, no.51 (5 July 1943).
174. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 31 December 1945.
175. Tottenham, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.
176. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p.63.
177. *Harijan*, 6 July 1942.
178. *Harijan*, 14 June 1942.
179. *Harijan*, 26 July 1942
180. Wickenden, *op. cit.*, p. 365.
181. *Loc. cit.*

# THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN GUJARAT

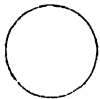
DAVID HARDIMAN

In western India, the Quit India Movement was less dramatic than in Bihar or UP, but it lasted far longer. In the rural areas there was in August 1942 no mass insurrection. The agitation gained momentum slowly, but once under way it continued strongly into 1943, and in some cases even longer. In districts such as East Khandesh, Satara, Broach and Surat large numbers of peasants took part in guerilla-style attacks on government property, lines of communication, and people known to be sympathetic to British rule. Because it had mass support, the movement in such areas proved hard to suppress. The agitation was remarkable also for the strength and duration of protest in towns such as Pune, Ahmadnagar and Ahmedabad.<sup>1</sup> One commentator even went so far as to label Ahmedabad in 1942 as 'the Stalingrad of India'.<sup>2</sup> Western India took the lead, furthermore, in bomb and sabotage activities. Of the 664 bomb explosions recorded in India from August 1942 to January 1944, 447 — or 76 per cent — occurred in Bombay Presidency.<sup>3</sup>

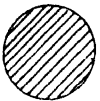
The pattern suggests that the movement in this part of India was, on the whole, better organised than elsewhere. In this essay we shall concentrate on Gujarat which was perhaps the best-organized province. At that time, Gujarat was divided into a large number of different territories. There were five districts under the Government of Bombay (Ahmedabad, Broach, Kheda, Panch Mahals and Surat), four districts under Baroda State (Amreli, Baroda, Mehsana and Navsari), some large princely states such as Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Junagadh and Kutch, and a mass of small princely states, some of which covered little more than a few villages. The Quit India Movement did not affect the whole of this region. It was strong only in the districts under British and Baroda rule, and it is on these areas that we shall focus our attention.



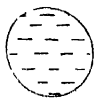
GUJARAT IN 1942



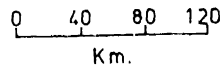
British territory



Baroda territory



Other princely states



## II

The Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee (GPCC) was renowned for its organization. It had been responsible for some of the more notable Congress successes during the 1920s and 1930s, such as the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928, and the salt march to Dandi and the Dharasana salt raids of 1930. The GPCC revolved around Vallabhbhai Patel, its president from 1921 to 1946.<sup>4</sup> Patel kept in direct touch with town, taluka and village level leaders who had, during the course of the movement, proved themselves to be able local political organizers. In the towns, these tended to be the leaders of the local petty bourgeoisie, and in the rural areas they were often leaders of particular peasant castes. By giving these men a relatively free hand at the local level, Vallabhbhai Patel was able to maintain an organization which continued to operate in a dynamic manner even after he had been arrested during campaigns of civil disobedience. The areas of the Congress's greatest strength were Ahmedabad, Baroda<sup>5</sup> and Surat cities, the districts of Kheda and Surat, and the Jambusar *taluka* of Broach district.

Although Vallabhbhai Patel became increasingly involved in all-India politics during the 1930s, he did not relinquish his hold over the Gujarat Congress. One rather hesitant attempt was made by Morarji Desai, the rising star of Gujarat politics, to elect an alternative president in 1934, but there was a quick retreat when it became clear that Patel opposed the move.<sup>6</sup> Patel's hold was strengthened further by the sweeping success of the Congress in Gujarat in the elections of 1937.<sup>7</sup> Another, rather different, challenge came from the socialist group in the Congress. The leaders were for the most part youths who had taken part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34, and who had become disillusioned with the reformist tactics of the right wing of the Congress during the closing stages of this struggle. Many became socialists while serving jail sentences. In July 1934, they founded the Gujarat Congress Socialist Party. The members of the socialist group were mostly young men from a high caste background, and they tended to be urban based, being strongest in Ahmedabad and Baroda cities. Their crusade against Gandhian ideals earned them the severe disapproval of Vallabhbhai Patel, and as a result they had no say over the running of the GPCC. It was generally believed that the socialist group in Gujarat had very little support. From 1937 they ran, however, a large number of study classes, and there was considerable sympathy for their ideas amongst some of the more able of the younger nationalists of Gujarat.



The Morarji Desai and socialist groups represented, at best, potential bases which could become important once Patel was removed from the scene through arrest. Even then, the majority of nationalists of Gujarat were firmly loyal to Patel. This was particularly true for the Patidar-based rural organizations, and also for the strong Congress youth organizations of the cities.

One group somewhat apart from this, but important for the events of 1942, was the Gujarat Vyayam Pracharak Mandal (Gujarat Society for the Propagation of Physical Training). This organization had strong nationalist leanings. Its leader, Chhotubhai Purani of Broach (1885-1950), had been associated with nationalist terrorist organizations in the early twentieth century, and although he had later become an active member of the Gandhian Congress, he never accepted the principle of non-violence. He founded a network of gymnasiums throughout Gujarat in which boys and young men were taught that they should train both their bodies and minds to fight the British. Besides being taught scouting, cross-country hiking and long distance running, they were encouraged to perform manual labour and community service. There were frequent debates at the gymnasiums on current affairs and other political and social topics.<sup>8</sup> The boys were mostly Brahmans, Vaniyas, Patidars and Anavil Brahmans from urban middle class and prosperous rural families. Gandhi approved of these activities in part because Purani refused to allow right-wing Hindu and anti-Muslim sentiments to be voiced in his gymnasiums.<sup>9</sup> The heyday of this movement was in the 1930s, and by 1942 there was as a result a large number of young men in Gujarat who were mentally and physically prepared to support a violent struggle against the British.

### III

Sir Roger Lumley, who was Governor of Bombay from 1937 to 1943, had since his arrival in India considered Gujarat to be '...the spiritual home of the Congress'.<sup>10</sup> He acknowledged that it was the Congress rather than the British which enjoyed mass support in this region of Bombay Presidency.<sup>11</sup> That there was deep distrust among Gujaratis as regards the motives and intentions of the British Government was revealed very clearly after the outbreak of war in 1939. British information about the war was ignored in favour of Hindi broadcasts from Germany and Japan and various, in Lumley's words, 'fantastic rumours'<sup>12</sup> which related to British disasters and impending attacks on India. In July 1940, Lumley reported :

Amongst the Gujarati bania element ...there is much disloyalty - in fact, some of those loyal Indians with whom I have contacts are not a little disturbed at the sentiments which they hear frequently expressed in Gujarati bania circles. There is much gloating over German successes and our reverses, and a good deal of talk to the effect that they would be no worse off under Hitler and that they see no reason why India should be apprehensive of a German victory.<sup>13</sup>

In May and June 1940, at the time when the Germans were winning sweeping victories in Europe, there was a run on banks and much hoarding of gold and silver in Gujarat.<sup>14</sup> After the German advance was halted the excitement subsided. There was then a lull in alarmist rumours until late 1941, when once more the war situation became critical. The entry of Japan into the war brought '...a fresh wave of pessimism and defeatism'.<sup>15</sup> The scaremongering increased as victory after victory mounted up for the Japanese. In December 1941 there was a rush on banks, renewed hoarding of precious metals and a spate of rumours. In early 1942 many Gujarati families of Bombay, fearing bombing and subsequent chaos, left the city for their ancestral homes in Gujarat.<sup>16</sup> The evacuees brought with them the stories and rumours current in Bombay. In March the first air raid practice in Ahmedabad was followed by an exodus from the city. 'Extreme nervousness' was reported amongst those who remained. In Surat city many merchants buried their valuables or hid them in wells.<sup>17</sup>

The merchants and businessmen of Gujarat were terrified that if the Japanese advanced into India the British would carry out a scorched earth policy to prevent the Japanese from gaining control of factories and resources which would be of value to them in their war effort. Their fears were reinforced by reports of what had happened to Gujarati businessmen in Rangoon when the city was evacuated.<sup>18</sup> They had heard from Gujaratis who had fled from Singapore how the British had, during the evacuation, favoured whites over coloureds, and they were warned not to depend on the British in such times of crisis.<sup>19</sup> By May it was feared that the Japanese fleet would attack the west coast of India at any moment, and there was in consequence widespread hoarding of food throughout Gujarat and Saurashtra.<sup>20</sup> The hoarding, coupled with the severe shortage of transport available for foodstuffs, produced a rapid rise in food prices in June and July 1942, which added to the feeling of impending catastrophe. News of the fall of Tobruk in June made it seem that India was vulnerable now from both the west and the east, and it was widely believed that the British

collapse was imminent. In July the authorities in Gujarat reported a feeling of great insecurity in the villages and a big demand for weapons for self-protection.<sup>21</sup> It was in this explosive atmosphere that the Congress leaders launched the Quit India Movement. In acting as they did, they proved to be very much in tune with the mood of the people of Gujarat.

The initial preparation for the struggle in Gujarat was carried out by Vallabhbhai Patel during the second half of July 1942. Of all the leading Congressmen of the province, Patel was most enthusiastic for the coming confrontation with the British.<sup>22</sup> He believed that the time was ripe for a massive revolt which would force the British to hand over power to Indians, after which the latter could organize popular resistance to the Japanese. As he said at the time: 'This will not be a long struggle. It must produce quick results. We must get independence before the Japanese come here'.<sup>23</sup> He believed that there had to be mass civil disobedience with maximum disruption of all government, and strikes in which industry and communications would be paralysed. In his words: '...if there is your wholehearted support, the struggle will be over and won in a matter of days'.<sup>24</sup> 'When the leaders are gone to jail, the entire field will be open to you. Remaining within non-violence, break down all government authority'. '...do not wait for any programme. Invent your own'.<sup>25</sup>

Many Congress leaders both in Gujarat and other parts of India feared such an opening of the floodgates. Morarji Desai, for instance, believed that all of Gandhi's work for non-violence would be undone and that Vallabhbhai, in advising his followers as he did, was tacitly allowing the socialist element within the Congress to indulge in violence. Kanaiyalal Desai, President of the Surat District Congress Committee, agreed with Morarji in this.<sup>26</sup> Reading between the lines, we can see Morarji Desai's fear that such a movement would greatly strengthen the socialist element in Congress.

Arguments such as Morarji's were rejected at the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha on 14 July 1942, and the decision was taken to launch civil disobedience. After the meeting was over, Patel returned to Gujarat, where he delivered a series of fighting speeches in Ahmedabad, Kheda district and Surat district. He held discussions with Congress workers from all parts of Gujarat and Saurashtra, and met the nationalist leaders of Baroda state and pressed them to join the agitation.<sup>27</sup> According to Sir Roger Lumley: 'It was common talk, both in Ahmedabad and Bombay, amongst Congressmen, that Patel, in these private meetings, told them that on this occasion they would go all out,

and were not to be too squeamish about non-violence'.<sup>28</sup> This is borne out by a report of a Congress meeting in Ahmedabad on 25 July, when Patel said of the forthcoming struggle:

It would not stop even if there was civil war or anarchy in the country and that it would shake the whole world. It would be carried on by the masses even if all the leaders were arrested by the Government.....The Congress would not interfere if some people lost their temper and took dangerous and drastic steps against the Government during this struggle, nor would Gandhi show his disapproval in that connection.<sup>29</sup>

On 27 July he told another meeting in Ahmedabad :

If all the leaders are arrested tomorrow and there is no time to meet you again, you should carry on the programme set forth before you by Gandhi from 1919 to 1942. Die but do not fall back. In this struggle, if instances like Viramgam occur or the railway line is removed or an Englishman is murdered,<sup>30</sup> the struggle will not be stopped. If the scorched earth policy is sought to be pursued here, as in other countries, do not allow it to be carried out. Face it boldly, even at the cost of violence. Carry this message to every nook and corner of Gujarat. You should put aside the constructive programme now and be ready to carry out Gandhi's *farmans*. Acts of violence even of the type of Chauri Chaura will not stop the movement.<sup>31</sup>

On 1 August, Vallabhbhai Patel travelled on to Bombay to prepare for the AICC meetings of 7 and 8 August, at which the 'Quit India' resolution was passed. In Bombay he formulated plans for a campaign of sabotage, and in the early hours of 9 August, just before he was arrested, it appears probable that he passed on these plans to a Congressman from Gujarat who left immediately for Gujarat and escaped arrest. T. Wickenden, in his official report on the agitation, later wrote about Patel: 'It is likely that he had a more personal part in the actual issue of instructions of sabotage than any of the other leaders'.<sup>32</sup> During the next few days these sabotage plans appeared in underground Congress bulletins issued from both Bombay and Ahmedabad.<sup>33</sup> The outburst of violent protest in Gujarat thus occurred with the full support and according to the well publicized plans of the president of the GPCC, Vallabhbhai Patel.

## IV

As soon as the news of the arrest of Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel and the other Congress leaders reached Ahmedabad City on the morning of 9 August, the millworkers downed their tools, the merchants closed their shops, students left their schools and colleges, and large crowds flocked into the streets. They began to molest policemen and anyone wearing that symbol of colonial culture, the *solar topi*. A police station was attacked and set on fire. In the ensuing battle between the police and people, one demonstrator was shot dead. The crowd was eventually dispersed with tear-gas, and troops were posted to prevent further violence.<sup>34</sup> On the following day about 2,000 students took out a procession. When the police tried to break it up with lathi charges, the students counter-attacked, throwing bricks. One student was killed and many others injured before they were dispersed.<sup>35</sup> Demonstrations and clashes with the police continued at a high pitch for another two weeks. The mills and shops remained closed and the students stayed away from their schools and colleges.

In Kheda district there were demonstrations and hartals from 9 August onwards in most of the towns and Patidar villages which had a history of support for the Congress. Many of the demonstrations took a violent turn when the police tried to break them up with lathi charges. The crowds fought back in actions that often led to police firings. The first such incident was on 11 August, one person being killed when the police opened fire. On 13 August, a more serious incident occurred in the noted Congress centre of Dakor, where a crowd of 2,000 counter-attacked, killing two policemen and injuring two others. In the resulting firings, two demonstrators were killed and many others injured. One of the dead was the Secretary of the local taluka Congress Committee.<sup>36</sup> There were further clashes over the next four days, during which two more agitators died at the hands of the police. The next serious incident occurred at Adas railway station, where a party of students who had come from Baroda to distribute Congress propaganda were shot at by the police on 18 August. Four students were killed and five seriously injured.<sup>37</sup> In all, a total of ten agitators were killed by the police in Kheda between 11 and 19 August. These were the highest recorded casualties for all of Gujarat during that period. In addition to the open clashes, there was widespread cutting of telegraph wires and other minor

acts of sabotage on public property. According to Sir Roger Lumley, Kheda was the most disturbed district in Bombay Presidency during August. He dispatched two companies of British troops with orders to march through the district as a warning to the agitators.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to Kheda, Surat district—that other great centre for rural nationalism during the 1920s and 1930s—was subdued during the first weeks. Surat city was peaceful on 9 August. On 10 and 11 August, boys from the schools and colleges took out processions and there was a partial hartal. The processions were dispersed by the police. On 12 August, most of the shops reopened and only rather feeble attempts were made to hold meetings. By 14 August, the students were returning to their schools and colleges.<sup>39</sup> On 23 August the Collector of Surat commented that Surat city had been remarkably quiet.<sup>40</sup> The rural areas were more militant, particularly Jalalpor *taluka* and, to a lesser extent, Bardoli and Valod *talukas*. There were demonstrations and acts of railway sabotage. For instance, on 17 August two hundred peasants from four Patidar villages converged on the railway station at Timbarva in Bardoli *taluka*, burnt the records, smashed up the equipment and removed several railway lines.<sup>41</sup> Two days before this, a large crowd attacked a party of policemen at Amalsad, an Anavil Brahman village of Jalalpor *taluka*. After the police took shelter at the railway station, the crowd, by now 3,000 strong, smashed up the station, removed some rails and sacked the post office.<sup>42</sup> On 21 August there was a clash between villagers and police at Matvad, a coastal village of Jalalpor *taluka* inhabited by Koli peasants. Two villagers and one policeman were killed and four other policemen seriously injured. Elsewhere in Surat district there were no serious disturbances during the first two weeks.

In Broach district there were processions and demonstrations in the towns, and in the Patidar village of Sarbhan (Amod *taluka*) a police party which tried to break up a procession was beaten up by a large crowd on 13 August.<sup>43</sup> In the Panch Mahals district there were demonstrations in the towns but little disturbance in the rural areas.<sup>44</sup> The same was true for the small towns and villages of Ahmedabad district.

In Baroda state, the agitation was most intense in Baroda city, Baroda district, Mehsana district and in Navsari town (which adjoined Jalalpor *taluka* of Surat district). The nationalist party of Baroda city, the Praja Mandal, was not banned immediately by the state authorities and processions were permitted until 18 August. There was one clash on 9 August, when demonstrators attempted to march on the British Residency, which was in an enclave of British territory.<sup>45</sup> During the following days there were

frequent processions, and officials and *topi*-wearers were harassed. The millworkers went on strike, there was a partial hartal, and the students stayed away from their schools and colleges. By 17 August, the moderate Praja Mandal leaders were forced by popular pressure to declare their open support for the Quit India movement, and on 18 August the body was banned and the leaders arrested. In the turbulent demonstrations which followed, two were killed and many others injured in police firings.<sup>46</sup> Police and troops then moved in force into the Raopura area—the storm centre of the agitation in the city—and carried out house-to-house searches.<sup>47</sup> As a result of the strong *bandobast* crowds were unable to gather, and by 24 August an uneasy calm had descended on the city. The strike by students and millworkers continued.<sup>48</sup>

In Baroda district there were hartals, school strikes and processions in small towns and in many Patidar villages. These continued at a high pitch until the end of August. Conditions were similar in Mehsana district, which also had a strong Patidar element in the rural population. In several cases, large numbers of Patidar peasants flocked into the nearest towns to take part in demonstrations. There were also many cases of railway sabotage.<sup>49</sup>

In the other princely states of Gujarat there were few disturbances. On the whole, protest was confined to demonstrations in towns by the urban middle classes. Only in Bhavnagar, Rajkot and Wadhwan states was there sustained agitation.<sup>50</sup> The people of Bhavnagar were most militant, and attempts were made there to hinder the war effort. On 15 September a demonstrator was killed in a lathi charge after a crowd tried to prevent the loading of a steamer with goods destined for the war. This was the only death caused by police action throughout the whole of Saurashtra during the Quit India Movement. Rajkot was the headquarters of the British Resident for the states of western India, and protests there were chiefly staged outside his office. There, and in Wadhwan, demonstrations were largely peaceful. The middle class nationalists of Saurashtra failed to win support from the peasantry. In fact, the one demonstration of any significance in Porbander was suppressed by the police with the help of peasants brought into the town in buses by the Maharaja. Generally, people in the rural areas of Saurashtra knew little about the nationalist movement.<sup>51</sup> This obviously served to greatly weaken the protest there.

In all, during the first two weeks of the agitation in Gujarat, three policemen and sixteen demonstrators were killed. Of the latter, ten were killed in Kheda district, and two each in Ahmedabad city, Baroda city and Surat district. During this initial

phase the violence was less than in Bombay city (where 33 people were killed in firings in the first four days) and northern and eastern India. By the standards of previous movements in Gujarat since 1920, the casualties were however very high, and the psychological impact on the agitators was profound.

By now new leaders were emerging to replace those in jail. The two most important among them were B. K. Mazmudar and Chhotubhai Purani. Mazmudar (1902-1981) was a Kayastha of south Gujarat who had studied at the Banaras Hindu University and London School of Economics. He settled in Ahmedabad in 1930 to work as secretary to the prominent millowner, Kasturbhai Lalbhai. Mazmudar was a leading figure in socialist intellectual circles in the city during the 1930s. He was thus in close touch with both the socialists and capitalists of Ahmedabad. He was a good friend of Achyut Patwardhan for the two had studied together at Banaras. During the movement he maintained firm links with Patwardhan and other leaders of the All India Secret Committee, such as Jayprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia. During the course of the struggle he travelled secretly to Bombay and Pune to meet these leaders and to formulate strategy.<sup>52</sup> Chhotubhai Purani, the leader of the Gujarat Vyayam Pracharak Mandal, went into hiding in the villages of northern Broach district. Like Mazmudar, he was in contact with the All India Secret Committee. But as he was a well known public figure, he was unable to travel as freely as Mazmudar. In addition to organizing a powerful underground movement in the villages in which he was staying, Purani called on his followers throughout Gujarat to take an active part in sabotage activities. The response to this call was very positive. Under these all-Gujarat figures there were the local leaders, such as Jayenti Thakor in Ahmedabad—a Congress socialist—and Thakorbhai Desai in Surat district—a member of Morarji Desai's group. They combined a programme of open mass demonstrations with secret sabotage work. The strength of these men stemmed from their position as leaders within existing Gujarat organizations which functioned within the broad ambit of the Congress Party. They were able to use these existing networks, drawing on the loyalties which had been built up within them, to carry on the movement in a highly effective manner.

Their activities were financed in part by voluntary donations, in part by exactions. In some cases the nationalists resorted to outright robbery and looting, in others they put intense moral pressure on people to donate money. Much of the money was given willingly. In Ahmedabad, Jayenti Thakor issued a directive from his so-called 'Azad Government' that all houseowners should



contribute to nationalist funds at a rate of one anna for each fifty rupees earned. By early November this 'tax' had brought in Rs. 7,000.<sup>53</sup> Amongst other things, the money was used for collecting arms and making bombs and other sabotage weapons, and also for financing the extensive publicity that was required during the agitation.

The chief organ of publicity was the *patrika* (bulletin). *Patrikas* were printed and cyclostyled on a large scale and distributed by hand throughout Gujarat by Congress workers. The main centre for *patrika* production was Ahmedabad city, where an underground Congress publicity organization ran four cyclostyling machines, kept in different places to avoid detection.<sup>54</sup> Other towns throughout British Gujarat and Baroda State also had secret presses and cyclostyling machines.<sup>55</sup> In the *patrikas* the people were told what they should do to support the movement, and news was published about the struggle in Gujarat and other parts of India. Some of the *patrikas* followed the orthodox Gandhian line of non-violence, others endorsed sabotage, terrorism and violence. This did not represent any divide in the movement in Gujarat, for the two types of *patrika* were put out by the same organizations. Rather, it reflected the desire of the underground leaders to win support from all shades of nationalist opinion.<sup>56</sup>

In the *patrikas*, factual news and rumours were often jumbled together. Rumours played an important role in the struggle, for they helped to rouse emotions and often gave an impression that the movement was on the verge of success. Some rumours found chalked up on a notice board in Baroda city during the first week of the agitation give a good impression of the exaggerated stories which circulated in Gujarat at this time. It was said that soldiers had been raping and shooting women and murdering children; that American soldiers had laid down their weapons and were refusing to fight unarmed Indians; that the British were in such a perilous state that the Viceroy was preparing to leave for England.<sup>57</sup> It was also widely rumoured that Mahadev Desai, who died suddenly on 15 August, had been tortured to death in jail by the British in an attempt to make him divulge information about secret negotiations between the Congress and the Japanese.<sup>58</sup>

British officials were much impressed by the thoroughness and depth of the organization of the agitation in Gujarat.<sup>59</sup> It was this which in a large measure gave such prolonged power to the movement there. In the next two sections we shall examine how the agitation continued in the months after August 1942, looking first at the cities of Ahmedabad and Baroda, and secondly at the rural areas.

## V

In Ahmedabad city leadership of the movement was taken up by a young Congress socialist called Jayenti Thakor (b. 1913). He became known as the *Shahersuba*, or 'head of the city'. Under him were nineteen *ward nayaks* (ward leaders) in charge of the fourteen municipal wards of the city.<sup>60</sup> Under them were *pol nayaks*, who were leaders of the enclosed caste-based enclaves known as *pols* which honeycombed the old part of the city. The *pol* provided one of the basic units of solidarity within the city. Through this chain of command, Jayenti Thakor could pass orders to activists throughout the city within hours. Thakor was also in close contact with leaders of other groups within the city, such as the heads of the student group, the women's group, sabotage groups and the children's group (*Vanar Sena*), and they also followed his directives.

The core of the support for the movement in both Ahmedabad and Baroda cities came from middle class people of higher castes. Their localities provided the centres for the agitation. In Ahmedabad, business came to a virtual halt as a result of the closures of the retail, wholesale and share markets in protest at the government repression. These closures were enforced by the *Mahajans*, or unions, of traders for each locality of the city. The *Mahajans* were dominated by Vaniyas, but membership cut across caste lines. In a few cases, caste councils also demanded that their members support the agitation; but this was not a very important means of enforcing solidarity.

The chief unit of solidarity was, rather, the *pol*. As people living in a *pol* tended to be largely of one caste, this represented a form of caste solidarity. Underground workers were able to hide in the *pols* with little fear of capture, for no body of policemen could enter a *pol* without alarms being raised. Fugitives could thus flee from back entrances or over the roof-tops long before the police reached their hiding places. In some cases the police were actively prevented from entering *pols*.<sup>61</sup> In Ahmedabad the authorities tried to counter *pol* solidarity by removing the huge wooden gates from the entrances to sixteen of the most troublesome *pols*. But this had little effect.

The *pols* which gave most trouble to the authorities were situated in Khadia and neighbouring areas of Ahmedabad and in the Raopura area of Baroda. Khadia was considered a centre of intellectual life in Ahmedabad. The people of the locality had a reputation for their independence of mind and their suspicion of authority. The chief castes of Khadia were the Nagars and the

Brahmo-Kshatriyas, two of the best educated communities of Gujarat. Members of these two castes often served in government administration. The top leaders of Ahmedabad in 1942 were all from Khadia. Jayenti Thakor was a Brahmo-Kshatriya of the locality. In Baroda the *Panch Pals* (Five pals) of Raopura were considered by the state authorities to provide much of the power behind the agitation in the city. The *Panch Pals* were inhabited largely by Patidars who had migrated to Baroda from Kheda district during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In common with the Patidars of Kheda, they had a strong commitment to the nationalist cause, and they gave firm support to the Quit India Movement. Most of the big processions in Baroda originated from these five *Pals*.

The *Pals* provided an ideal hiding place for underground saboteurs in the two cities. In Ahmedabad, the chief sabotage group was formed by thirty young men of Khadia on 13 August, under the leadership of K. G. Prabhu. They resolved to cut telegraph lines and damage railways and other government property. They signed an oath of secrecy using their own blood as ink. Others joined soon after, bringing the total strength to about 150. They travelled to the princely states of Saurashtra to purchase revolvers, bullets and explosives, and to Bombay to buy chemicals for bombs. Besides equipping themselves, they passed on weapons and explosives to other sabotage groups in Gujarat. They hid their equipment in private houses, mostly in Khadia.<sup>62</sup> Bombs were made in the house of a perfumer and hair-oil manufacturer called H. K. Dyer. The first bomb was thrown in Ahmedabad on 17 September. There were nine more cases during that month.<sup>63</sup> But the bombers suffered more than the bombed. Between 25 and 30 September, four saboteurs were blown up by their own bombs in the city.<sup>64</sup> Besides, the bombs tended not to be very effective as they were mostly made of gunpowder, a low explosive which made a lot of noise but did minimal damage to masonry. As a result, the authorities did not feel greatly threatened by their activities. In the words of Sir Roger Lumley: '...I cannot help being impressed by the feebleness of the attempts at sabotage with which we have had to cope'.<sup>65</sup>

More effective were the big mass protests. In the cities, the chief forms of such protest were processions, the holding of special days of protest and the continual harassment of the authorities, often by many acts of co-ordinated petty sabotage. The processions were often very rowdy affairs, with the police attacking with lathis and the demonstrators fighting back with stones and brickbats. On the whole, the police refrained from using firearms against the crowds,

and when they did fire it was done to frighten rather than inflict casualties. As a result, the numbers killed and wounded in such clashes were very slight by most twentieth-century Indian standards. No policemen were killed, and in all only five demonstrators died (four in Ahmedabad and one in Baroda). Officials of the Bombay Home Department felt that the Ahmedabad police were being too gentle with the demonstrators, and that this was the reason for the continuing militancy of the people of the city. The Ahmedabad police chief replied that the demonstrators were suffering considerable punishment in lathi charges, and this was an adequate deterrent.<sup>66</sup>

Notably absent from these demonstrations were the Muslims, who made up twenty per cent of the population of Ahmedabad and fifteen per cent of the population of Baroda. Ever since the breakdown of the Congress-Khilafat alliance of 1920-22, the Muslims of Gujarat had played little part in the nationalist movement. Before the late 1930s they had not, however, adopted a position of outright hostility to the Congress. In the 1937 Legislative Assembly elections, the Muslim League had managed to win only four of the eight seats in Gujarat reserved for Muslims. All this changed over the next few years. As a counter to the Congress mass contacts movement in Bombay Presidency, Jinnah launched his own Muslim League mass contacts movement in mid-1937. Branches of the Muslim League were established all over Gujarat and an intense campaign of propaganda was launched. Soon, the Muslims of Gujarat were regarding the Congress ministry in Bombay and Congress-controlled local authorities with profound suspicion. In February 1938 the Bombay Presidency Muslim Association met in Ahmedabad and passed resolutions which expressed complete lack of faith in the Congress ministry.<sup>67</sup> The Muslims became extremely aggressive. In March 1938 there were riots during Muharram in two places in Kheda district, and over the next two years there were further disturbances in Kheda, Ahmedabad and the Panch Mahals districts. In 1938 the Congress-controlled Ahmedabad Municipality caused a storm in the city when it tried to close down a Muslim graveyard.<sup>68</sup> A Congress Inspector who visited Ahmedabad in July 1940 reported back to the All India Congress Committee: '...the influence of the Moslem League among the Moslem masses is so great that they will not listen to you if you are a Congressman.'<sup>69</sup> In January 1941, Lumley reported to Linlithgow: 'In Ahmedabad, the Muslim League has improved its position and can now be said to have nearly all Muslims in the City within its fold. In the recent Municipal elections, all the Muslim seats were secured by Muslim Leaguers...'<sup>70</sup>

In April 1941, the Muslims of Ahmedabad launched a massive attack on the Hindu localities of the city. After four days of furious rioting, 76 lay dead and over 300 more were injured.<sup>71</sup> Most of the casualties were Hindus.<sup>72</sup> There was a particularly fierce battle in Khadia, in which the Hindus counter-attacked with considerable ferocity. After that, few Muslims dared enter the area. Lumley commented on the riots: '...I do not think that there can be any doubt that the basic origin of these riots is political and is due to the preaching of Pakistan and the counter-preaching of the Hindu Maha Sabha and to some extent to the civil disobedience movement, which the Muslims regard as an attempt to coerce us into granting a Hindu Raj.'<sup>73</sup> Afterwards, the Muslim League paid the fines of convicted Muslim rioters and the Congress paid the fines of convicted Hindu rioters.<sup>74</sup>

It was hardly to be expected, therefore, that the Muslims of Gujarat would show any sympathy for the Quit India Movement. This was particularly so in Ahmedabad, where it was the Hindus of Khadia who supported the agitation most strongly. In mid-August 1942, the twelve Muslim members of the municipality were the only ones who refused to support a motion condemning the arrest of the Congress leaders.<sup>75</sup> In October 1942, when some stones thrown by Congress supporters at the police happened to fall into a Muslim area, the Muslims retaliated by looting a Hindu-owned shop and robbing a passing Hindu woman. A major riot was prevented by prompt action by police and troops.<sup>76</sup> In February 1943 there was a more serious clash after some Congress nationalists attacked a Muslim policeman.<sup>77</sup> In Baroda city, the Muslims met at the Jama Masjid on 26 August 1942 and resolved not to take part in the Quit India Movement.<sup>78</sup> They believed that the Baroda Praja Mandal was a communal organization representing only Hindus.<sup>79</sup>

The relationship between the working classes of Ahmedabad and Baroda and the middle class nationalists was, on the whole, a happier one. In 1942 there were in Ahmedabad 75 textile mills with about 116,000 workers; in Baroda 5 mills with about 12,000 workers. In Ahmedabad, work within the mills was divided on communal lines. The majority of the spinners were Harijans, originally from villages in north Gujarat. The weavers, on the other hand, were for the most part Patidar immigrants from north Gujarat and Muslims whose ancestral home was the city.<sup>80</sup> The most powerful of the labour unions in both cities was the Majur Mahajan, which had been closely connected with the Gandhian Congress for over two decades. In Ahmedabad, this union had a membership of around 50,000 in 1942.<sup>81</sup>

During the war the Majur Mahajan had managed to negotiate a series of favourable wage rises for the textile workers and, as a result, in Lumley's words: 'Their hold over labour in Ahmedabad is impressive.'<sup>82</sup> On 9 August 1942 the textile workers struck work in protest at the arrest of the Congress leaders. In Baroda city, the strike began on 13 August. There were, in addition, strikes in mills in the smaller towns of Nadiad, Petlad, Viramgam, Kalol, Kadi and Broach. The strike was purely political, not being connected with any demand for higher wages. The workers intended to remain out only for a short period. It was a time of shortages and soaring prices, and they could not hope to survive long without wages. The Gandhian leaders of the Majur Mahajan had other ideas, however. A strong campaign was mounted to persuade the workers whose ancestral homes were outside the city to return to their villages, where they could be fed by their families. As a result, about two-thirds of the millworkers left the city. The large majority of those who remained were Muslim weavers.<sup>83</sup>

Although the millowners were losing considerable profits from the closure of the mills during the boom period of the war, they made no effort to persuade the workers to return to work. Many of them had nationalist sympathies. Vallabhbhai Patel, who had considerable influence over them, had in July 1942 encouraged them to take the lead in paralysing the textile industry.<sup>84</sup> During the first week of August 1942, the Ahmedabad Millowners Association donated huge sums of money to the Congress in response to an appeal by Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>85</sup> The influential millowner Kasturbhai Lalbhai, who was in close contact with the underground leader B. K. Mazmudar, took the lead in persuading his fellow millowners to agree to a long-term closure.<sup>86</sup>

The millowners were frightened that if the Japanese advanced into India, the British might destroy their textile mills as they retreated. They therefore had little to gain, so it seemed, from all-out co-operation with the British war effort, and they had considerable sympathy for the Congress suggestion that the Indian people should negotiate a separate peace with Japan. Even if the British were victorious, the millowners saw little to be gained from supporting them to the hilt, for they realized that the Congress would most probably form a government in India after the war, and that it was in their long-term interests not to alienate that party at this critical juncture.<sup>87</sup> Besides fearing damage to their factories and plants through war action, the millowners were in addition frightened that if they did not keep their mills closed nationalist saboteurs might bomb or burn them down.

Although the millowners thus supported the Quit India move-

ment to the extent of keeping their factories shut, they never came out in favour of it openly. In talks with the British between August and November they always held that the workers were responsible for the closures as they refused to return to work. Even Kasturbhai Lalbhai took this line in public.<sup>88</sup> To a large extent, therefore, the millowners were sitting on the fence, waiting to see how the conflict would shape before making a definite move one way or the other.

Within days of the closure, the millworkers who had remained in Ahmedabad began to demand that the factories reopen. Being Muslims for the most part, they had no sympathy for the agitation.<sup>89</sup> The communist union of the city, which already had a sizeable following,<sup>90</sup> put out an appeal for the workers to demonstrate at the mill gates with the cry 'Give us Work or Bread!'<sup>91</sup> During September there were a series of such demonstrations. Communist workers toured the villages of north Gujarat to persuade the spinners to return to the cities. The Majur Mahajan countered by sending its own representatives to tell the workers that the mills were not about to open, so that it would be futile to return. The millowners and merchants of the cities tried to pacify the workers by opening half-price grain shops and by giving loans which were to be repaid after the mills reopened. Large numbers of workers took advantage of these arrangements.<sup>92</sup>

During October the millowners' resolve to keep their factories closed began to weaken, for huge profits were being lost. Cloth prices were rising rapidly at this time, in part as a result of the continual closure of the Ahmedabad mills. Between August and December prices rose threefold.<sup>93</sup> In addition, the British were threatening to punish them for keeping their mills idle. The collector of Ahmedabad said that he would cut off their supplies of coal and Lumley hinted that he might cancel their government contracts and demand compensation for orders which had not been fulfilled.<sup>94</sup> By early November, it was also becoming clear that the war was turning in Britain's favour and that the time for sitting on the fence was over.<sup>95</sup>

On 13 November, the Majur Mahajan leaders suddenly came round to the demand for reopening. On 11 and 12 November there had been demonstrations outside the Majur Mahajan offices by spinners demanding an end to the lockout. The spinners had shouted anti-Congress slogans. The Majur Mahajan leaders, fearing that they were rapidly losing their hold, agreed to a return to work from 23 November.<sup>96</sup> The middle class nationalists of the city were bitterly upset by this capitulation. Over 500 young volunteers were dispatched to the villages of north Gujarat to tell

the workers not to return to work. Their message combined an appeal to patriotism with warnings that those who went back would suffer severely. The workers were told that the factories might be blown up by nationalist saboteurs while they were in them.<sup>97</sup> But by now the workers were desperate for work, and by 18 November large numbers were returning to the city.

The authorities were concerned lest there be clashes on the one hand between the workers and the middle class nationalists, and on the other hand between the Hindu and Muslim workers. Troops were therefore kept at the ready and a cordon was thrown around the old city to prevent the middle class nationalists from reaching the mill areas. As it was, bombs were exploded by underground activists in five electrical sub-stations which served the mills on 22 November, in an attempt to sabotage the return to work on the 23rd. The damage was however slight, and did not stop the mill sirens from sounding again next morning after a silence of three and a half months. Within days the mills were functioning at full strength. This dealt a serious blow to the movement in Ahmedabad. Soon after, many markets and shops which had been shut since 9 August reopened, and by early December the economic life of the city was returning to normal.<sup>98</sup>

The middle class nationalists had not yet lost heart. Unruly demonstrations and clashes with the police continued. On 10 December large crowds attacked the police in several areas of the city. In the resulting firing one man was killed and three injured. There was similar violence on 9 January 1943, when the police killed one and injured four, and 10 March 1943, when one was killed and one injured. These were the last casualties: thereafter the demonstrations became less intense and less frequent. It was, however, only after August 1943 that the agitation died away completely in Ahmedabad city.

## VI

In August the protest in rural areas was strongest in Kheda district. Surat district was initially less militant. From September this changed, with the agitation in Kheda becoming increasingly muted while the agitation in south Gujarat became more and more powerful. This turnabout was heralded with an event which caught the imagination of nationalists throughout Gujarat—the raid on the Vedach police station in Jambusar *taluka* on 22 September.

The Congress leader Chhotubhai Purani had gone into hiding in the villages of this area. With him was another leading Congress-



man of Broach called Chandrashankar Bhatt and a Rajput called Meghji, a dacoit who during the 1930s had become a Congressman. On 22 September Meghji and Bhatt captured the Vedach police station in a surprise attack, and appropriated all of the muskets kept there. This action signalled the beginning of a campaign of rural terror directed against officials, policemen and local supporters of British rule in Broach district, Surat district and the Baroda district of Navsari. In Broach district this campaign was at its height from late September to late December 1942. The places chiefly affected were the four northern *talukas* of Jambusar, Amod and Vagra. Villages were attacked and the village records and record offices were burnt. There were a large number of robberies and dacoities directed against anti-nationalist elements. In many villages of Jambusar *taluka* the underground Congress workers rather than the British were in effective control, and cases were reported of Congress flag-hoisting ceremonies which the authorities were powerless to prevent.<sup>99</sup> Even though the British dispatched armed police and troops to the area in late September, they were unable to restore order, for the villagers refused to provide any information on the whereabouts of the underground Congress workers. On 4 December they managed to kill two members of Meghji's group in a gun battle.<sup>100</sup> But this had little effect on the nationalists, for on 15 December they carried out another daring raid on a police station, this time at Sarbhan, a Patidar village of Amod *taluka*. Meghji, Purani and Bhatt led this raid in which the police sentry was shot dead and all the policemen inside were captured and stripped of their uniforms. The station was vandalized and all the guns and ammunition were taken. As a direct result of this, all the minor police stations of Broach district were closed down, as they were considered too vulnerable.<sup>101</sup> On 18 December a company of troops arrived in the district and carried out demonstration marches in the three northerly *talukas*. The dacoity died down abruptly thereafter. In January and February 1943 some of the dacoits were arrested, though the three leaders escaped. Purani and Bhatt left Gujarat to carry on underground work in Bombay City and, later, in eastern India.

In Surat district, strong pressures were brought to bear on village headmen (*Patels*) who refused to resign. Initially, many resigned voluntarily, particularly in Bardoli *taluka*. Many more refused to resign, and from early October onwards direct action began to be taken against them. Attacks were mostly directed against their property. Ripening crops were destroyed and mango trees were cut down. Mango was an important cash crop in the area. In several cases the houses of *patels* were set on fire. In only

one case was the attack physical: a *patel* who had been a particularly notorious opponent of Congress for many years was—along with his wife—severely injured in a bomb blast in his house in a village of Bardoli taluka.<sup>102</sup>

In Jalapor *taluka* of Surat district, Thakorbhair Desai and Lalbhair Nayak, who were Anavil Brahmans of Morarji Desai's group, organized a series of raids on village *chavdis* (government record offices), post offices and other offices and other government properties. They broke in and burnt records and furniture. In several cases they set the *chavdi* on fire. Except for lathis, they carried no arms and they were careful not to injure anyone physically.<sup>103</sup> The members of the gang were local Anavil Brahman and Koli peasants who carried on their normal work during the day, and participated in raids at night. They began their attacks in November: from 4 to 12 November they raided 27 different villages. A company of troops was rushed from Bombay to patrol the area.<sup>104</sup> This had little effect, for the troops patrolled only the roads, whereas the saboteurs moved on country tracks, avoiding the motor-roads. During November, December and January this and some other allied groups carried out a total of 76 raids on 60 different villages. In early January, sixteen leading members of the gang were captured in Baroda territory.<sup>105</sup> Thereafter there were fewer raids: nine in February, four in March and one in April. Thakorbhair Desai was captured eventually in May 1943 and Lalbhair Nayak surrendered in October 1943.

In south Gujarat the local adivasis also took part in the movement. In the predominantly adivasi talukas of Mahuva, Valod, Vyara, Songadh and Mandvi, some adivasis who had been organized by Congress nationalists and also, in some cases, by Kisan Sabha workers during the 1930s carried out a series of attacks on loyalist *patels*, Vaniya moneylenders and Parsi liquor and toddy shopkeepers. The Parsis were ruthless exploiters of the adivasis and, over the years, many had become big landlords by expropriating adivasi land. They were known to be strong supporters of British rule. In 1942 the adivasis raided the villages in which there were loyalist *patels* and Parsis. They burnt their haystacks, cut down their toddy trees, smashed their toddy pots and set alight their liquor and toddy shops. They broke into and looted their houses and set them on fire. In addition, they raided the houses of Vaniya moneylenders and destroyed their account books, hoping thereby to wipe out their debts. As a result many *patels* resigned and many Parsis closed down their liquor and toddy businesses for the duration on the period of attacks. These raids came to an end on 8 February 1943, when the Navsari district

police captured about 200 of the adivasi dacoits and in the process recovered substantial amounts of loot.<sup>106</sup>

The only other area of Gujarat in which there was any degree of continuing rural violence was the Panch Mahals district. In February and March 1943 there were four dacoities by a gang led by an underground worker called Bhimsinh Parmar, who had linked up with a local dacoit. Parmar had informed the local adivasis that British power was on the wane and that the time had come to strike against the local usurers. The adivasis rose up and looted the houses of the moneylenders, taking cash and clothes and, in all cases, burning the account books. No physical harm was done to the moneylenders. In late March the police broke up the gang and arrested many of its members.<sup>107</sup> The only other major incident in the Panch Mahals was a raid on a police outpost by a gang led by an underground Congress worker in May 1943. Two police muskets were captured.<sup>108</sup>

In Kheda district the movement died down considerably after the first one and a half months. There were few demonstrations, and loyalist *patels*, government officials and liquor dealers were not attacked. Protest was confined largely to acts of petty sabotage by groups of high caste youths, many of whom were associated with Purani's gymnasiums. Telegraph wires were cut, schools were vandalized, post boxes were destroyed, postmen were ambushed and, in a few cases, village record offices, post offices, and other government offices were damaged.<sup>109</sup> In February 1942 the police chief for Gujarat, J. W. Rowlands, commented: 'Kaira might have been one of the worst districts in the Province. In the event it has turned out to be one of the least troublesome...'<sup>110</sup>

One of the most noticeable differences between the rural agitation in 1942 and earlier Congress agitations in Gujarat was that in 1942 the peasants did not refuse to pay their land revenue and other taxes. Revenue refusal was on the nationalist agenda in 1942, and the British anticipated such a campaign in Gujarat, and we therefore need to ask why this form of protest never occurred. An important reason was that land revenue collections started only in December and January, so that the movement had begun to flag before the land revenue became due. However, a considerable number of collective fines were levied on villages which had given violent support to the struggle but in only five out of fifty cases was any attempt made to refuse to pay this fine, even though in most cases it was demanded soon after the start of the movement. The evidence suggests that even if the movement had continued strongly into 1943, there would not have been a no-revenue campaign.

The single most important reason for this was that the last such campaign, in 1932-34, had ended in failure. Considerable amounts of land had been confiscated from peasant activists of Kheda, Surat and Broach districts. Although this land had been returned by an Act of 1938 passed by the Congress ministry in Bombay, the peasants who had lost land had suffered severe hardships during the preceding six years, and they had no desire to repeat an ordeal still fresh in their memories. The 'no-revenue' campaign was no longer considered to be such a potent weapon as it had been in the heady days after the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928. This was somewhat ironic, for in fact the British were not prepared to confiscate land in 1942, as they knew that it would be returned by law as soon as the Congress returned to power.<sup>111</sup> Draconian measures were however planned for the suppression of any no-revenue movement, and in both Kheda and Surat districts British troops were ordered to march through previously trouble-some villages at the moment the land revenue became due. This show of strength ensured that the revenue was paid up promptly.<sup>112</sup>

A further reason was that the richer peasants of Gujarat were making big profits from the high wartime prices. Prices were rising rapidly in late 1942, coinciding with a bumper harvest for the year. At the end of August 1942, the Collector of Kheda predicted:

So far as I can gather there will be no movement for non-payment of Land Revenue when it falls due after three months. The crops are excellent and so are prices. The cultivator is expecting to realise for his crops almost double of what he got last year, and is in no mood to cooperate in a no-tax campaign.<sup>113</sup>

Although the no-revenue campaign never got off the ground, there was, as we have seen, considerable rural protest in Gujarat. The class support for this protest differed from area to area. In Kheda and Mehsana districts the protest was confined almost entirely to the Patidar peasantry, whereas in Broach, Surat and Navsari districts the more substantial Patidar and Anavil Brahman peasants were united with the poorer Koli and adivasi peasants in their opposition to British rule. To understand these regional variations we need to review briefly the history of these areas.

In Kheda and Mehsana districts, rural wealth was concentrated in the hands of the Patidar peasantry. The poorer peasants were to a large extent of lower castes who considered that they had been dispossessed by the Patidars over the centuries. These lower castes were often in conflict with the Patidars. The chief of these lower

castes were the Baraiyas, Patanvadiyas and Thakardas (the last found mostly in Mehsana district). During the period 1923-30, the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas of Kheda had been sympathetic to the Gandhian movement.<sup>114</sup> This sympathy was put under great strain during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31, and over the next decade relations between the Patidar and Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas deteriorated. The two low castes were angered in particular by the Act passed by the Congress ministry in Bombay in 1938 returning lands confiscated for revenue refusal during civil disobedience.. Those who had lost land were for the most part Patidars, and in many cases poor Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas had acquired the land at throw-away prices. Afterwards, they refused to part with the land voluntarily, and had to be forced to give it up by legislation.<sup>115</sup> This convinced them that the Congress was essentially a Patidar party.

The Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas claimed Kshatriya status and in 1937 they had formed a Kshatriya Association as a rival to the Patidar-dominated Kheda District Congress Committee.<sup>116</sup> This proceeded to link up with the Gujarat branch of the Kisan Sabha, which had been started in the same year. The Kisan Sabha was fighting for land to the tiller, lower rents, lower revenue and a moratorium on debts. All of these demands held great appeal for the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas. In 1940 there were peasant marches and a no-rent campaign in a petty state within Kheda district in which the majority of the peasants were of these two castes.

The hostility between the Patidar-dominated Congress and the low caste movement was revealed very sharply in August 1942, when a meeting of Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas was called to protest against the killing of two police constables by Congress activists. The two policemen happened to be Bariya by caste. The 10,000 strong crowd who attended this meeting resolved that they would give no support to the Quit India movement. A pro-nationalist Baraiya held a counter-meeting, but few turned up.<sup>117</sup> Attempts made by Patidars to persuade the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas to support the agitation largely failed.<sup>118</sup> The widespread opposition by the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas of Kheda undoubtedly helped to dampen the rural protest in this district in 1942, for it was too risky for the Patidars to launch a widespread campaign of sabotage when a large proportion of the peasantry would almost certainly have been prepared to inform on them.

A similar pattern was observed in Mehsana district of Baroda State, where the Patidar peasantry were firm supporters of the Baroda State Praja Mandal. In August 1942 they came out in

processions and demonstrations, causing considerable trouble to the Baroda authorities. The lower castes of the district took a directly opposite line. In September 1942 there were meetings by Thakardas and Rabaris in different parts of the district in which the Praja Mandal and Quit India Movement were condemned, and resolutions of loyalty to the Gaikwad of Baroda were passed.<sup>119</sup>

The situation turned out very differently in the northern part of Broach district, even though the social composition of this area was similar to that of Kheda, with a richer Patidar peasantry and poorer Baraiya and Patanvadiya peasantry. The Patidars had given firm support to the Congress for the past two decades, and in 1942 they came out strongly in favour of the agitation. The Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas of this area had not come under the influence of the Kshatriya or Kisan Sabha movements during the 1930s, and in 1942 they also supported the struggle. Here, therefore, there was rural unity and, as we have seen, the British virtually lost control of this area in late 1942.

In Surat and Navsari districts the agitation enjoyed strong support from all classes of peasants. The Anavil Brahman and Patidar rich peasants had been strongly pro-Congress since the end of the First World War. The somewhat poorer Koli peasants of the coastal areas had given firm support to the nationalist movement since 1929. Dandi, the scene of the famous salt satyagraha of 1930, was a Koli village in this area. The adivasis of the eastern tracts had been won over to the Congress cause in the early 1920s,<sup>120</sup> and they had given support to the Bardoli Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31. During the 1930s the Kisan Sabha had made inroads amongst the adivasis by championing their demands for lower rents and land to the tillers. The Kisan Sabha leaders taught them that violence against their exploiters was justified. In this area the chief exploiters were Parsi liquor dealers-cum-landlords, who were pro-British, rather than high-caste nationalistic peasants, so that in this area there was no contradiction between the demands of the poor peasantry and the nationalist movement. As a result, in 1942, local activists, including Kisan Sabha workers, took the lead in encouraging nationalist dacoities by the adivasis against the Parsis and other exploiters. In 1942, there was thus a considerable degree of peasant unity in south Gujarat in the struggle against British rule.

## VII

In Gujarat, the Quit India Movement came as a culmination of intense nationalist activity over a period of nearly twenty-five years. It was above all a political protest against continuing British

rule in India, launched at a moment when it was felt that the edifice of the Raj was about to crumble, and it demonstrated the continuing strength of the Indian National Congress in the political life of Gujarat. The Congress Party depended for its strength on its ability to mean many things to many men, championing as it did the demands of the urban middle classes, prosperous dominant peasants, struggling subordinate peasants, Harijans and adivasis. In 1942 members of all of these classes supported the struggle in considerable numbers in different parts of Gujarat. In cases in which there was no immediate clash between the class interests of these disparate groups, the national front forged during the 1920s and 1930s stood firm during the period.

It did not, however, stand firm everywhere. Whereas in the past the subordinate peasantry of central and northern Gujarat had been mildly sympathetic towards the Congress, in 1942 they were extremely hostile. The same was true for the Muslims. In both cases there had been a noticeable change in consciousness, with a conviction growing amongst them during the 1930s that the Congress Party was working against their interests. In this respect, there was less unity in the nationalist movement in Gujarat in 1942 than there had been in 1920-22 and 1930-31.

Also, despite all the rhetoric, the movement in Gujarat was not socially very radical. The first patrika of August 1942 told the people to 'create a revolution'.<sup>121</sup> The words 'revolution' (*inkilab*) and 'freedom' (*azadi*) were however used almost interchangeably. 'Revolution', in other words, meant no more than the removal of British rule. Although the means by which this was to be done were spelt out in great detail in the patrikas of this period, little was said about what was to be done once this freedom was gained. One patrika said that 'the people's administration will be formulated parallel to Government administration'.<sup>122</sup> But no guidelines were laid down as to the form which this alternative administration should take.

Even then, a very successful parallel government was established in Ahmedabad. To some extent this body duplicated the existing administrative structure, with underground leaders in charge of each municipal ward, but it was also more comprehensive, stretching as it did to the level of the *pol*, and taking within its fold organizations such as the women's group, the Vanar Sena, the student organization, and the groups of saboteurs. This 'Azad Government' not only organized frequent demonstrations, but also took more positive administrative initiatives, such as levying taxes, issuing information in patrikas, collecting intelligence through a network of spies, and punishing certain notorious

policemen.<sup>123</sup> Although the leadership was in the hands of young Congress socialists, this body drew its legitimacy from the broad mass of the Hindu middle classes of the city. The working classes were less under its sway, as was revealed in November 1942 when they returned to the mills in defiance of its orders. This was the only parallel administration established in Gujarat in 1942. No attempts were made to set up such bodies in the rural areas, as happened in Satara district of Maharashtra or Medinipur district of Bengal. The reason for this was that the movement in rural Gujarat was for the most part controlled by members of dominant castes, such as the Patidars and Anavil Brahmans, who had an aversion to the concept of 'parallel government'. For such people it was an idea loaded with radical implications, and they had no desire to upset the rural status quo. *Azadi* for them meant a transfer of power, and they confined their activities in 1942 to sabotage and punishment of people loyal to the British. As a result, when the rural underground activists were hounded down by the police in early 1943, the peasantry had no alternative programme to turn to.<sup>124</sup> Thereafter the movement in the countryside soon petered out. Only in the adivasi areas of south Gujarat were there indications of a more radical movement, for there the struggle was directed chiefly against Vaniya moneylenders and Parsi landlords-cum-liquor dealers. Local high-caste Gandhian leaders proved very sensitive to the implications of such activities, and did their best to discourage them.<sup>125</sup> Yet even though the Vaniyas and Parsis had fled away in terror to the towns by early 1943, no attempt was made to establish an alternative administration. The organization in the area proved too disjointed for any such move.

We cannot therefore describe the movement in Gujarat as being 'revolutionary' in a socialist sense. Morarji Desai's fear that it would strengthen the left in Gujarat was not borne out in practice. In this, Vallabhbhai Patel proved the shrewder judge of his fellow-Gujaratis. He knew their capacity for forceful protest, and he knew also that they were unlikely to turn *en masse* to more radical programmes and doctrines in the course of such a movement.

As it was, the Quit India Movement strengthened the hold of the Gandhian Congress over Gujarat. Although the agitation began to wane by early 1943 and was dead by the middle of that year, this failure did not bring in its wake a decline in Congress popularity, as had happened in 1922 and 1931. In these years Gandhi had called an abrupt halt to movements which were in full spate, thus generating a sense of betrayal among the people. In



1942-43 the movement was crushed in a very uncompromising manner by the British, and the popularity of the Congress was enhanced. The people felt bound together with their jailed leaders in a continuing struggle against British rule. This was revealed in 1944, when the Congress swept the polls in the Gujarat local elections of that year with huge majorities and then refused to operate the councils which they now controlled. Law and order may have been restored, but British prestige very clearly had not; the majority of Gujaratis still had full faith in the party of Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel.

### Notes

1. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (New Delhi, 1938), p. 397. The movement started very strongly in Bombay city, but faded rapidly.
2. Govind Sahai, *'42 Rebellion* (Delhi, 1947), p. 124. A Government of India report of 5 September 1942 singled out the closure of the Ahmedabad mills as being the only element of the movement in Bombay Presidency which was causing an important interruption to the British war effort. N. Mansergh ed., *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol. II (London, 1971), p. 905.
3. Francis Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement* (New Delhi, 1971), p. 338.
4. See my book *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917-1934* (New Delhi, 1981), pp. 115-17.
5. For a history of the nationalist movement in Baroda State see pp. 123-31 of my essay 'Baroda: the Structure of a 'Progressive' State', in Robin Jeffrey, ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power* (New Delhi, 1978).
6. Kalyanji Mehta to Vallabhbhai Patel, 27 August 1934, Private papers of Kunvarji Mehta.
7. Congress won all of the 19 general seats and 3 out of 5 of the special seats in Gujarat in 1937. It failed to win any Muslim seats; *Return Showing the Results of the Elections in India, 1937. Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers 1937-38. Vol. XXI* (London 1937), pp. 29-38.
8. Interviews with Chinubhai Shah (Secretary of Gujarat Vyayam Pracharak Mandal) in Rajpipla, Nirubhai Desai in Ahmedabad. Chandrashankar Bhatt in Broach.
9. In this, there was a marked contrast with the gymnasiums of Maharashtra. For Gandhi's opinion about Purani's gymnasiums, see *Navajivan*, 15 June 1924.
10. Lumley to Linlithgow, 18 December 1937, India Office Library (hereafter IOL), L/P & J/5/155.
11. Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 January 1940, IOL, L/P & J/5/160.
12. Lumley to Linlithgow, 9 July 1940, *ibid.*
13. Lumley to Linlithgow, 19 July 1940, IOL, L/P & J/5/161.
14. Fortnightly report from the Government of Bombay to the Government of India for the first half of the month (hereafter FRI) June 1940; Fortnightly report from the Government of Bombay to the Government of India for the second half of the month (hereafter FR2) May 1940, IOL, L/P & J/5/160..
15. Lumley to Linlithgow, 3 October 1941, IOL, L/P & J/5/162.
16. Tokyo Radio was announcing forthcoming bombings of Bombay in its Hindi broadcasts, and British air raid precautions added to the apprehension; Lumley to Linlithgow, 5 March 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
17. FR1, March 1942, *ibid.*

18. FR2, March 1942, *ibid*.
19. Rajabali Jumabhai, President of the Indian Merchants Chamber in Singapore, gave speeches to this effect in Ahmedabad in mid-April; FR2, April 1942; *ibid*.
20. FR1, May 1942, *ibid*.
21. FR1, July 1942, *ibid*.
22. Patel was probably the most enthusiastic of all of the top Congress leaders in 1942. He threatened to resign from the Congress Working Committee in June 1942 if a decision was not taken in favour of civil disobedience; P. N. Chopra, *Quit India Movement: British Secret Report* (New Delhi 1976), pp. 197,233.
23. Narhari Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. II (Ahmedabad, 1956), p. 474.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 475.
25. *Conscience*, Ahmedabad, 7 August 1942, in National Archives of India, Home Political Department (hereafter NAI, H-Pol), 49/9/43.
26. Morarji Desai, *The Story of My Life* Vol. I (Madras, 1974), pp. 177-80; B. G. Kunte, ed. *Congress Activities 1942-46 (Collected from the Maharashtra State Records)* (Bombay, 1977), p. 40.
27. P. N. Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, p. 245; Dewan of Baroda to British Resident, 3 June 1943, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 290-91.
28. Lumley to Linlithgow, 27 August 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
29. P. N. Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, p. 56.
30. Patel is referring here to three instances of violence which occurred during the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919. In Viramgam, in the words K. L. Gillion, '...a crowd of over a thousand people attacked the railway station and other government buildings. Six rioters were shot dead by the police, and an Indian official who was believed to have ordered this firing was caught by the mob, had kerosene poured over him and was burnt to death'. At Nadiad, in Kheda District, a train carrying troops was derailed after nationalists sabotaged the tracks, and in Ahmedabad a European police sergeant was murdered; K. L. Gillion, 'Gujarat in 1919'. in Ravinder Kumar ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford 1971), pp. 137 and 142.
31. P. N. Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, pp. 197-98.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200 and 292.
33. Examples of these bulletins (patrikas) are given in the appendix to this essay.
34. Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay, Home Department (Special) (hereafter BA, H.D. (Sp.), 1110(6)—A(3) of 1942.
35. J. R. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalishni Hind chhodoni ladatma Ahmadavad-nu paradhan' (Ph.D. thesis Gujarat University, 1975), pp. 79-84.
36. *Conscience*, Ahmedabad, 7 August 1942, in National Archives of India, Home Political Department (hereafter NAI, H-pol), 49/9/43. NAI, H-Pol, KW V to File 3/15/43, p. 16; Interviews in Dakor.
37. NAI, H-pol, KW V to File 3/15/43, p. 35.
38. Lumley to Linlithgow, 27 August 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
39. Reports by Collector of Surat, 9-14 August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110(6)—A(7) of 1942.
40. BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110(109)—G of 1942-43.
41. Report by Collector of Surat, 24 August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110(8) B(3) of 1942.
42. *Loc. cit*.
43. Report by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, 14 August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110(6) A(5) of 1942.
44. Reports by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110 (6) A (6) of 1942.

45. Baroda Records Office (hereafter BRO), Huzur Political Office (hereafter H. P. O.) Pol. Dept. 38 : 97.
46. Baroda Press Note, 21 August 1942, *ibid*.
47. *Praja Mandal Pegam No. 3*, 21 August 1942, *ibid*
48. Police Report, 24 August 1942, *ibid*.
49. BRO, H. P. O., Pol. Dept., 38 : 100.
50. Following information on the states of Saurashtra is from the weekly reports by the Resident for the States of Western India, IOL C. R. R. R/1/1/3804.
51. This ignorance was remarked on by Gital Steed, who carried out research in a village of Saurashtra in 1949-50; 'Notes on an approach to a study of Personality Formation in a Hindu village in Gujarat', in McKim Marriott ed., *Village India* (Chicago, 1955), p. 114.
52. *Shri B. K. Mazumdar Sahebna Samman Prasange Abhivancana* (Atul, 1974).
53. Report by C. I. O. Bombay, 3 November 1942, NAI, H-Pol, 3/6/42. When Linlithgow heard about this, he refused to believe that there could be such a tax, for the collectors would be arrested. The Bombay Government had to inform him that the collectors enjoyed popular support and that the report was, regrettably, true; Linlithgow to Lumley, 10 November 1942 and comment by Bombay Government, 24 November 1942, *ibid*.
54. Interview with Jayenti Thakor.
55. J. R. Shukla mentions Baroda, Navsari, Mehsana, Attarsumba, Dabhoi, Varnama, Itola and Sinor, among other places; J. R. Shukla, 'Quit India Movement in the Vadodara State' paper presented to the Gujarat Itihas Parishad, 1976 pp. 2-3.
56. Interview with Jayenti Thakor. See also: Report by Baroda Resident, 17 August 1942, in which the British Resident noticed that there were two types of patrika circulating in Baroda City, one advocating sabotage and violence, the other tax refusal and non-violence. IOL, C. R. R. R/1/29/2431. Patrikas of both types can be found in the appendix.
57. Note on Praja Mandal Agitation in Baroda State by C. K. Daly (Resident), 17 August 1942, *ibid*.
58. Report by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, 26 September 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110(6)—A(5) of 1942; Note by British censor, 28 November 1942, IOL, C. R. R. R/1/1/3804.
59. For instance, see comments by Collector of Ahmedabad, quoted by Lumley to Linlithgow, 24 September 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
60. A list of the ward nayaks reveals that 5 were Brahmans, 5 were Vaniyas, 5 were Patidars, 1 was a Brahmo-Kshatriya, 1 was a Harijan, and 2 were of unknown caste; Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', p. 68.
61. For an example from Baroda, see Police Report, 1 October 1942, BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 97.
62. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', pp. 286-89.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-97.
65. Lumley to Linlithgow, 24 September 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
66. Note by Add. Sec. H. D. (Sp.) 14 November 1942 and note by Police Commissioner, Bombay Presidency, 19 November 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.), 1110 (109)—D of 1942-43. By mid-November, 34 demonstrators had been killed in Bombay City, 10 in Kheda district, 9 in Thana district, but only 2 in Ahmedabad City.
67. FR2, February 1938, IOL, L/P & J/5/156.
68. Collector of Ahmedabad to Commissioner, Northern Division, 5 May 1941, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 844 H VII of 1941.

69. A. I. C. C. Inspection Report by R. K. L. Nandkeolyer, 29 August 1940, Nehru Memorial Library, A. I. C. C. File 14 of 1939.
70. Lumley to Linlithgow, 3 January 1941, IOL, L/P & J/5/162.
71. *Times of India*, 19, 23 and 25 April 1941.
72. FR2, April 1941, IOL, L/P & J/5/162.
73. Lumley to Linlithgow, 1 May 1941, *ibid*.
74. FR2, May 1941. *Ibid*.
75. Shukla 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', p. 170.
76. FR1, October 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
77. Report by D. S. P. Ahmedabad, 4 February 1943, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6)—A(3) III of 1942.
78. Police Report, 27 August 1942, BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 97.
79. Baroda FR1, June 1940.
80. In 1930 it was estimated that only 20% of the millworkers of Ahmedabad were born in the city. 60% came from other parts of Gujarat; Sujata Patel, 'The Capitalist Class and Labour Politics: A Case Study of the Ahmedabad Millowners Association', (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, 1984) p. 50a.
81. Figures in *Times of India*, 20 November 1942. For a history of this union, see Sujata Patel, 'The Capitalist Class and Labour Politics'.
82. Lumley to Linlithgow, 5 March 1940, IOL, L/P & J/5/160.
83. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', p. 132.
84. FR2, July 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
85. FR1, August 1942, *ibid*; Kunte, *Congress Activities in 1942-46*. p. 51.
86. Dwijendra Tripathi, *The Dynamics of a Tradition; Kasturbhai Lalbhai and His Entrepreneurship* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 181; Howard Spodek, 'On the Origins of Gandhi's Political Methodology: The Heritage of Kathiawad and Gujarat', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 30 : 2, February 1971, p. 366.
87. This appreciation of the millowner's point of view is based on a report by the British police officer, Roderick Parkes; R. Parkes to E. C. Gibson, 18 August 1942, IOL, C. R. R. R/1/1/3804. Linlithgow gave similar reasons for the millowner's attitude in a letter to provincial Governors of 2 November 1942; Mansergh, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. III (London, 1971), p. 190.
88. Lumley to Linlithgow, 24 September 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
89. Report by D. S. P. Ahmedabad, 27 August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6) A(3) of 1942.
90. After the ban on communist organization was lifted by the Congress ministry in 1937, the communist millworker's union in Ahmedabad managed to build a solid position for itself. Its most notable success was a strike it initiated in November 1937; FR1, October 1937, FR2 November 1937, Lumley to Linlithgow, 18 December 1937, IOL, L/P & J/5/155.
91. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', pp. 134-35.
92. *Ibid* pp. 136-40; *Ahmedabad Millowners Association General Body Minutes* 1942, Reports of 15 September 1942 and 26 December 1942. I am grateful to Sujata Patel for this reference.
93. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', pp. 144-45 and 162.
94. Lumley to Linlithgow, 24 September 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163.
95. The victory at El Alamein came at the end of October 1942, and in the east the impetus of the Japanese advance had clearly been halted by the arrival of large Allied reinforcements in India.
96. Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalisni', p. 142; Police Commissioner, Bombay Presidency, 19 November 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110 (109) D of 1942-43; Lumley to Linlithgow, 18 November 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163; D.S.P. Ahmedabad, 14 November 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6) A (3) (II) of 1942.

97. BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 98; Shukla, 'Ek hazar nav so betalismi', p. 146.
98. 4 of the 5 mills in Baroda City had already opened by the end of October. The fifth reopened on 9 December. The mills at Naidad, Petlad and Viramgam reopened on 23 November. The mills at Broach, Kalol and Kadi were by then already functioning.
99. Reports by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, November and December 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6) A(5) of 1942.
100. *Loc. cit.*
101. Report by D. S. P. Broach and Panch Mahals, 16 December 1942, *ibid.*
102. Report by Collector of Surat, 7 October 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6) A(7) of 1942.
103. According to Lalbhai Nayak, during August 1942 he and Thakorbbhai Desai tried to prevent the movement in their area from becoming violent, but when they realised that the people were thirsting for violent action against the British, they decided to channel these energies into a programme of comparatively mild acts of sabotage of government property in which nobody got hurt. Interview with Lalbhai Nayak in Navsari.
104. H. V. R. Iengar to Collector of Surat, 10 November 1942; BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110 (109) G of 1942-43.
105. Police Report, 8 January 1943, BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 101.
106. BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 99 and 38 : 101.
107. Report by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, 6 and 22 March 1943; Addl. Sup. Police. Broach and Panch Mahals, 22 March 1943, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6) A(6) I of 1942; J. R. Shukla, 'Hind Chhodo Ladatna Panch Mahal Jilla', *Pathik*, June 1976.
108. BRO, Confidential Section, Daftar 7, File 158.
109. NAI, H-Pol, 3/15/43.
110. Rowlands to Inspector General, Poona, 19 February 1943, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110 (109) E of 1942-43.
111. Lumley to Linlithgow, 15 October 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163. For details about the return of confiscated lands in 1938-39 see BA, Revenue Department 7159/33-1.
112. Lumley to Linlithgow, 18 November 1942. FR1, November 1942, IOL, L/P & J/5/163; Lumley to Linlithgow, 8 February 1943, IOL, L/P & J/5/164.
113. Collector of Kheda, 30 August 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110 (8)-B (1).
114. See my *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, pp. 45-50, 173-78, 198-200, 206-207.
115. Lumley to Linlithgow, 15 November 1937 and 18 December 1937, IOL, L/P & J/5/155.
116. John Wood, 'The Political Integration of British and Princely Gujarat: The Historical-Political Dimension of Indian State Politics' (Ph. D. thesis. Columbia University, 1972). P. 324.
117. Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat: A Study of the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha* (Bombay, 1975), p. 39.
118. The Patidars of the prestigious Patidar village of Dharmaj offered to dine together with the Baraiyas if they agreed to support the movement. The offer was rejected. Collector of Kheda. 7 October 1942, BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110 (109) E of 1942-43.
119. Report of 22 and 23 September 1942, BRO, H. P. O. Pol. Dept. 38 : 100.
120. For details see my paper, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat: The Devi Movement of 1922-23', in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi, 1984).
121. *Azad patrika* no. I See appendix I for the full text this patrika.
122. See Appendix V, pp 114-21.
123. Interview with Jayanti Thakor. Thakor said that they only harassed and

threatened such policemen. They refrained from killing them—which they could easily have done—as this would have invited military rule, as happened in 1919.

124. The peasant movement in Satara District suffered similar reverses in early 1943, but the local activists turned this defeat to advantage by changing tactics and establishing parallel governments. See the chapter in this book by Gail Omvedt, 'The Satara Prati Sarkar'.
125. An important underground leader of this area, Lalbhai Nayak (an Anavil Brahman), told me in an interview that the adivasis were wrong to attack landlords and moneylenders, who were fellow-Indians. The movement was meant to be against the British only. He felt that such actions would alienate—in his words—'the public', and he did his best to stop the adivasi movement.

## APPENDIX

### *Five Gujarati Patrikas of August 1942*

These five patrikas of August 1942 have been collected from British records, where they are available in English translations from the original Gujarati. Unfortunately, they are written in the kind of bastardized English frequently used by police translators, in which words are ill-chosen and there are many grammatical errors. Although the meaning is normally obvious this makes for difficult and tedious reading. As the Gujarati originals were almost certainly grammatical and properly-worded, I have taken the liberty of correcting the grammar, vocabulary and spelling of the translations so as to permit fluent reading. In doing this, I believe that a truer appreciation of the spirit of these patrikas can be obtained. I have been careful throughout not to omit any phrases or change the meaning.

### I

#### *Azad Patrika No. 1<sup>1</sup>*

Message of revered Mahatmaji to free India :

'India is free.'

'Everyone should do his best to free India by acting within the bounds of non-violence.'

'Completely paralyse Government administration by strikes and all non-violent means.'

'Do or die.'

How will you carry out the above message of revered Bapuji?

1. Do not obey the authority of anybody except that of the nation.

2. Completely close down all factories, mills, colleges, markets, etc. till India becomes free.
  3. Completely non-cooperate with Government.
  4. Persuade the police to disobey Government orders.
  5. Destroy telegraph and telephone wires.
  6. Create complete dead-lock of Government administration.
  7. Picket Government offices and do not allow Government administration to function.
  8. Propagate news about this national revolution and this final conflict by writing, by word of mouth and by all other means, such as by writing and distributing patrikas or by writing messages on walls or on the ground. Do this whatever the dangers.
  9. As long as the British administration continues in India, capture colleges and bring the administration to a stand-still.
  10. Take out processions, hold meetings and create a revolution.
- In the absence of our revered leaders give effect to the above message and bring revered Gandhiji and other leaders as quickly as possible out of jail.

## II

### *Azad India<sup>2</sup>*

Publisher—Azad Indian

To—Believers in *Azadi* (freedom)

On 7—8 August the All India Congress Committee published a resolution that India is *Azad* and the next day the strictest measures of repression were adopted, such as firing, lathi charges, arrests of leaders and so on.

The Government policy is to frighten the people so that Government machinery may function smoothly. Despite this, the spirit of resistance is increasing.

The newspapers say that resistance is decreasing and that some people are attending their daily work.

No man or woman in Gujarat or India who believes in the principle of *Azadi* can sleep soundly.

Do this much :

Every *Azad* individual should be prepared to sacrifice his life in the struggle. Only in this way will there be substantial results.

1. Stop communication by cutting telegraph wires at many places.
2. Stop railway communication by removing rails.
3. No connection should be kept with the Satanic Government. Advise Government servants to resign from service.

4. Villagers should declare that they are *Azad* and do not believe in Patel, Talati, Fouzdar, Mamlatdar, Collector etc.
5. Capture police *chokis* (sub-stations) in the villages and destroy the lathis and guns which are kept there.
6. Poor people should assemble in thousands and raid all Government offices and destroy the records by burning. Building used as courts should be made useless.
7. Mill labourers should not attend the mills and should try to carry out the above programme as far as possible.

Destroy the satanic administration.

Do not have any relationship with those who are siding with the satanic administration and inform the Government that India is bound to become free and will be *Azad*. Repression will not affect us. Things may be quiet temporarily, but not forever.

See that our prestige is not lost.

Gandhiji, who is 74 years old, is on fast. If he dies and if India remains quiet the blot will remain on the youth of India forever, and on that day the whole world will say that the youths of India are not real youths but that they are impotent. India is not destined to remain tied by the bonds of slavery. Can this be tolerated by Indian youths?

(Poem) The Drum is heard, awake the fighter, awake, awake.

Run away, run away, Oh! Cowards.

The voice of the peasants is heard : *Inkilab Zindabad* .

Azad Press, Hindustan.

### III

#### *Create complete deadlock<sup>3</sup>*

The message of Mahatma Gandhi at the time of going to jail was as follows :

Every man can go to any limits, so long as he remains within the limits of non-violence.

Create a complete deadlock by means of strikes and other non-violent means.

Do or die.

#### *Programme*

1. Observe strikes in every city and village of India and continue on strike till further orders come from the Congress.
2. If you are a merchant, do not open your shop, and if necessary remove the goods from your shop and vacate it.



3. If you are a student leave your school or college and put aside your books and propagate the message 'Quit India'.
4. If you are a Government servant, do not be disloyal to the nation. Do not crush the march towards independence. Take pride in being a Congressman.
5. If you are a peasant, refuse to pay land revenue.
6. If you are a soldier or policeman, refuse to open fire or use gas and lathis against your brothers and sisters. Let them know that you are a Congressman.
7. All citizens should refuse to recognize British rule. Stop contributing to war funds, stop all materials which are going to help the war effort, boycott Government machinery and take such steps as will paralyse the administration.

CREATE SUCH OBSTACLES AS TO PREVENT THE USE OF THE TELEGRAPH, THE POSTAL SERVICE AND TELEPHONE SERVICE. PULL THE CHAINS OF RAILWAY TRAINS AND STOP THEM. PUT OBSTACLES ON ROADS ON WHICH POLICE MOTOR CARS AND LORRIES RUN AND DO NOT ALLOW ANY FACTORY WHICH IS PRODUCING WAR MATERIALS TO FUNCTION.

*Remembering The Principles of Non Violence, Do Whatever You Like. Do Not Sit Idle.*

*Whenever And Wherever You Come Across Englishmen Tell Them To Go Away And Suffocate Them.*

*Inkilab Zindabad*

## IV

### *Azad Patrika No.2<sup>d</sup>*

#### I am Indian

I am Indian and proud of it. I am a slave, but I am neither blind to the fact nor am I a coward. I have thrown off the shackles of slavery from my heart.

My eyes have been opened and I see everything with an independent eye. I have decided that nobody can prevent me from proceeding along the path of freedom.

I cannot be deceived by false promises and juggling of words. I know my path is difficult. My path is strewn with burning cinders, but I am sure that if I want to live there is no other way but to tread upon those cinders as if they were a bed of flowers.

Nobody can stop me, not even Japan and Germany and not even the might of British imperialism. .

I have determined to become free and I am suffocating without freedom. I am dying without it. I see that the whole world is ablaze. I want to plunge into this furnace and obtain a 'new life'.

Have you read the words of Mahatmaji, *Azadi*? Mahatma has become *Azad* because he cannot live without it and that is why he has set ablaze the flame of *Azadi* in India.

We cannot live without plunging ourselves into this fire and showing Churchill and Roosevelt of America that behind Mahatmaji there are forty crores of Indians ready to lay down their lives in the battle for the freedom of India.

We have shown the way in Patrika No. 1, and subsequently we hear news of the struggle from everywhere in India.

Everyone should find the ways and means for carrying out their duty in the struggle. If anybody does not know what to do, he should ask others, and through the strength of unity carry out the message of Mahatmaji without the least delay.

Merchants, friends, stop giving foodstuffs to the Government and the military.

If some do not follow our request, then we appeal to workers and students to carry out peaceful picketing of mills and factories and persuade millowners and businessmen to carry out their duty.

## *News*

### **Bombay**

Situation is tense. Police opened fire. 13 killed and more than 250 wounded. Telephonic and telegraphic wires have been cut. Police *chokis* have been burnt. Mills and factories are closed. Railway connections have been discontinued. The Governor of Bombay had given orders for whippings as punishment. Still, Bombay is *Azad*.

### **Ahmedabad**

Strike continues. Mills and factories are shut. The police have opened fire and have resorted to lathi charges and have wounded large numbers in Revdi Bazar and Khadia. The police are not returning the dead bodies and they are cremating them themselves.

A sergeant aimed a gun at the Principal of Ahmedabad College and fired. It hit him in the head and so he died; after that the police entered the hostel and fired at a student. The student died a pitiful death, for as he died he was kicked in his belly until he was dead.

Firing took place about a dozen times. On all occasions the Hindus and Muslims have united together and have worked as if they want to forget the past. For all this the people should be congratulated.

Notices have been served on merchants that their shops will be broken open and that their goods will be destroyed.

#### Nadiad

There is a complete strike in the mills and high enthusiasm amongst students. There was a firing at 7.00 p.m. on 11 August 1942. One was killed. At Kadi, Kalol, Petlad and other such places mills and factories are shut and there is a complete hartal in the bazaars.

#### Baroda

The Suba prohibited processions and meetings and declared a curfew. To defy this order, Chunilal Shah took out a procession and held a meeting. 25,000 students have defied the order and have brightened the flame of *Azadi*. The national flag, which was never flown there in the past, is today being unfurled in every part of Baroda. The movement for *Azadi* is thus marching ahead. Mills and markets are closed. The students are marching ahead.

## V

### *Programme given to the Provincial Committees and public from the All India Congress Committee published by the Gujarat Provincial Committee<sup>5</sup>*

The day of Saturday the 8th August will be considered as ushering in a new era in the history of our country and it will be inscribed in the annals of history in golden letters. On that day the All India Congress Committee gave an order for the breaking of the chains of slavery and for freedom and revered Mahatma Gandhi was appointed the sole dictator of the fight for freedom by a resolution. He preached the first lesson of freedom in very firm and clear words resembling the flow of the constantly-flowing Ganges, for an hour and a half at the Gwalia Tank in Bombay to a congregation assembled there.

The British Government which has been sucking the blood of India by keeping her in slavery and has been making merry out of this exploitation could not tolerate this show of anger by the nation, and it began to wield the steel rod of repression. On

Sunday morning the revolution began along with the rule of repression. Early on Sunday morning revered Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Shri Sankarrao Dev, Shri Kripalani and other members of the Working Committee and our beloved leaders were arrested, and along with them all of the leading Congress workers in all provinces and districts all over India were also arrested.

There was great opposition to this drastic repression by the Government in Bombay, Pune, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Calcutta, Delhi and other cities. Youths and other citizens who desired freedom took out processions in which they shouted slogans for freedom; meetings were declared and resolutions were passed for freedom; and while they were protesting in a non-violent way they were repressed by lathi charges and tear gas, so that they were knocked unconscious and their eyes became swollen.

The Government may have thought that the people would be cowed down by such measures. The Secretary of State, Amery, proclaimed in England and to the people of America that he had nipped in the bud the Congress fight for revolution in India by these drastic measures and that he had thereby saved the allied nations. The brave people fighting for the freedom of the Motherland have thwarted him. For the last three days, strong opposition has not died down in the principal cities of our country. The brave people have not taken the slightest notice of lathi charges. They have rendered the tear gas useless by lying on the ground with their faces down and with wet handkerchiefs over their mouths. The fear of firing has no effect on them. Formerly on such occasions the people were frightened and cowed down by firing, but today they disperse when the firing starts and within a quarter of an hour they again assemble. Trams and so on no longer run in the cities.

Government may have thought that it would wreck the organization of the Congress by its sudden and simultaneous arrests, but it has failed. Not only is the All India Congress Committee still in existence, but it is pushing forward its work with force. It has now issued instructions on what is to be done by the people. As guidance can be obtained from these instructions by students and other workers in this fight for freedom, it has been considered necessary to get these instructions printed in large numbers and distributed amongst the people. It is for this reason that this small pamphlet has been prepared.

*Instructions received for the revolutionary fight from the  
All India Congress Committee*

The legacy of the revolutionary movement started by the men and women of India who want freedom has come to fruition with the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi. 'Do or die' should therefore be the motto of every child of Hindu mata. If we live, we shall live as free men, and if we die, we shall die as free man. So long as revered Gandhiji and other leaders are in jail we cannot sit at rest.

This is our last fight. If all of us will carry out our duty to do or die with a firm determination, this fight will be brought to a successful conclusion within two months. Not hundreds and thousands but lakhs of people will have to take part in this fight to break the chains binding the soul of India. All activities of a non-violent nature can be pursued. This fight should go on increasing in force day by day so that it will bring forceful and effective pressure on the Government to give us the valuable legacy of our freedom in the end. We must follow with confidence the *mantra* of 'do or die' given to us by Gandhiji when he was going to jail.

It is our first duty to maintain the spirit of revolution which was visible in the cities on the day of the arrests of Gandhiji and other leaders. The anger of the people must be channelled into building up strength to remove foreign rule and should not be confined to acts of destruction. Along with the cities, efforts should be made to awaken the people of the 7 lakhs of villages in India so that the upsurge will occur simultaneously in the cities and villages. Time is the most important element in all of this propaganda work. We have to show in two to four weeks that we are fit for freedom. Gandhiji has decided to go on a fast till death if it appears to him that the people are not prepared to make sufficient sacrifices for freedom. It will not do if the people of the cities are cowed down before the people of the villages are awakened, or if the people of the cities go ahead while those of the villages sleep. A programme must be organized to ensure that the people of the cities and villages are aroused simultaneously.

*Outline of the work to be done in villages*

Meetings should be held in every village. People should proclaim in these meetings that they are now independent of the British Government. They are not going to obey the laws of the Government, nor are they going to pay Government revenue assessments or rents or obey the orders of Government officers. They will have nothing to do with the British Government. In the

first instance, work of this nature should be carried out in smaller villages. Thereafter, arrangements should be made for processions from one village to another, and then the resolutions mentioned above should be passed in joint meetings of two or three villages. After that, meetings of even more villages should be held in which resolutions for freedom and unity should be passed. Through such propaganda work the people will be awakened, but without any definite work of this type the spirit of the people cools down in the end. Propaganda for a no-tax campaign will not give a definite direction to the spirit of the people at present because the time for the collection of the revenue is still far away. The above mentioned objectives will not be achieved by educating the people about shortages in food grains, rejection of currency and price controls et cetera. Such education must also be carried out; but the important thing is that when people have been fully awakened—and all are being awakened—their capabilities should be utilized in some definite work. In the present circumstances such a programme of work can take the form of non-violent attacks by thousands of people on the centres and symbols of British rule such as police thanas and taluka headquarter towns. The work of the thanas and taluka courts should be brought to a standstill. The police and Government servants should first be advised to abide by the authority of the people and if they refuse to do so they should be deprived of their arms and places of work. It should be remembered that such encircling attacks should be started in the most awakened and best organized parts of a district. It should be borne in mind that places in which there are communal or other kinds of likely conflict should not be selected for such operations.

It is necessary to arrange for such attacks to be made simultaneously throughout a district or province or, if possible, throughout the whole country. When people with well-awakened and organized strength launch such a non-violent attack in thousands on the headquarters of a district, this movement will have reached its zenith. When this happens, Government administration will come to a standstill; and not only that, for it will have broken down. When and while this is being done the people's administration will be formulated parallel to Government administration. In this way free India will begin her rule. It should be remembered here that it is necessary to have a campaign to bring Government administration to a standstill in all provinces simultaneously. The task of bringing Government rule to a standstill will be completed within four weeks from this day—though it is obvious that it is not possible to fix a rigid date in this matter.

During the gap in time between the present position of

paralysing Government rule and the proclamation of freedom, the people will complete the work of disobeying the Government and laws which they do not wish to abide by. For instance, people will prepare salt where necessary and will disobey orders for the vacating of their areas for military purposes, as also orders for attending any courts. In doing all of this work, it is necessary to set up organizations to carry them out and to create the proper machinery for disrupting the means of Government transport. These questions will be considered separately. This should be borne in mind. All attempts to commit acts of violence should be opposed. This question will be considered in more detail when considering the question of our relationship with Government servants. The above instructions are summarized as follows :

1. Hold meetings for the proclamation of freedom in all of the seven lakhs of villages of our country.
2. Arrange for procession from one village to another to carry messages for freedom and unity.
3. Disobey the authority of the Government and its laws. Take direct action, such as the establishment of active organizations, recruitment for the fight and get contributions for the fight.
4. Take possession of police thanas and taluka headquarter towns first, and then district headquarter towns in a purely non-violent way.
5. Try to complete this programme in about four days, and while doing so it should be borne in mind that the spirit of the people should not be allowed to cool and we should not attempt to quieten them, but rather encourage them.

### *The urban portion of India*

It appears from information received about incidents in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta and other places that there is great excitement among the people due to the bad deeds of the Government. On Sunday evening Mahatmaji was to have made a speech in Shivaji Park; but instead a big congregation of people had to suffer tear gas attacks. In Bombay there have been hundreds of lathi charges and frequent firings at various places up to this moment. The people have offered valiant resistance to all of this repression. Great care should be taken to keep up the people's spirit of resistance to Government repression and to strengthen the resolve of bands of men and women to stand up bravely instead of running away at the time of firings.

Instructions in this matter are as follows :

1. It is necessary to organize the spirit of opposition which has awakened so that it may be channeled properly. It is proc-

- laimed on good authority that a general hartal will continue throughout the country until Gandhiji and other leaders come out of jail. In the twenty largest cities of India it should be total.
2. All colleges and schools should remain closed until freedom is secured and Gandhiji and other leaders are released from jail. Students who are no longer able to work as a result of the strikes in colleges and railways should take part in protest demonstrations in the cities or they should go to the villages to participate in the above-mentioned four-week programme.
  3. All wholesale businesses, banks and other such offices and institutions should be closed and their clerks and other servants should stop working and come out. Shopkeepers should be persuaded to close their shops, except for those who deal in eatables and other necessities of life.
  4. During the period of the above-mentioned indefinite hartal, textile and engineering factories should be closed and their workers should come out.
  5. While the indefinite hartal continues, people working in railways, godowns, the departments of telegraphs, telephones, radio, electrical generation and distribution should be approached, and they should be persuaded to go on strike the moment the general hartal reaches its zenith after two to four weeks duration.

Care should be taken to ensure that the movement in the cities and villages reaches its zenith in four weeks from this day. Strong requests and instructions should be given in mild or severe words through published pamphlets, as is dictated by circumstances, to factory labourers, transport workers, clerks and other Government workers, and also traders and other such classes of people. In spite of severe repression, there ought to be hundreds of small processions and meetings throughout a city, and slogans should be shouted for freedom on as wide a scale as possible.

In working out our programme there comes before us the problem of organizing young men and women who have a firm determination to bring out efforts to a successful conclusion through various disorderly acts. This question is a difficult and problematic one. We may perhaps lose courage when we see how vast is the field of action and how lacking we are in materials. But it is more certain than today that revolution creates its own leaders. Moreover, if we know how to use the young men and women, they are there and ready. If all of the veteran Congress workers do not court imprisonment and remain outside it will not be possible to put them all in jail even in a fortnight, to say nothing of a day. In addition to such workers, hundreds of students and



labourers who have joined the strike are available and we can utilize them in the work in the cities and villages according to their intelligence and liking.

There is also the question of specialist work for revolution. Such activity should not be considered independent of our mass movement; it should be considered secondary to it. None of our activities should be such as to endanger the life of anyone, even a foreigner; and when an attack is made a timely warning should be given.

The question also needs to be asked as to what should be done to avoid violent reactions by those who are fired on. To start with hundreds of people should be ready to die, and when the situation is such, the military and the police may refuse to fire on a large scale. If we have sufficient non-violent strength, the people can snatch away the arms of the military sepoys without causing them injury, and in that case we shall not be far from our ideal. For such a programme, about a thousand non-violent volunteer martyrs will be needed.

In this connection it will be necessary to distribute pamphlets to the military and police and to persuade them verbally, even at the risk of personal danger. Indian police and army officers should be persuaded to believe that they are separate from the British Government, and they should be persuaded to serve the revolution by refusing to obey the foreign rulers. Even if they will not do this, we can surely get their agreement not to fire bullets at their unarmed brothers. An appeal can also be made to English soldiers not to fire at Indians who want their freedom. On such occasions, emphasis will have to be laid not only on the freedom of a country but on the freedom of every human being and the peace of the world.

Do or die.

Great leaders, we shall die, but shall die after doing something.

We shall obtain Gandhiji's release before he goes on a fast until death.

Long live the free rule of India.

### Notes to Appendix

1. This patrika was seized by the authorities in Broach on 12 August 1942. It had most probably been carried there from Ahmedabad by students, and it appears to have been the first patrika produced at the start of the struggle. It is repetitive and rather hastily produced. It recommends relatively non-violent resistance, and can be taken as being representative of the accepted Congress line of early August 1942. Source: Report by Collector of Broach and Panch Mahals, 13 August 1942. BA, H. D. (Sp.) 1110(6)—A(5) of 1942.

2. This patrika was found circulating in Baroda during the first week of the movement. It may well have been produced outside Baroda State. Its message is more violent than that of *Azad Patrika No. 1*. Source: Note on Praja Mandal Agitation in Baroda State by C. K. Daly, 17 August 1942, IOL, C. R. R. R/1/29/2431.
3. This patrika was also found circulating in Baroda during the first week of the movement. Its message is similar to that of *Azad Patrika No. 1*—though there are some interesting variations and additions. It may have been a local version of *Azad Patrika No. 1*. Source: as for patrika II.
4. This patrika was likewise found circulating in Baroda during the first week of the movement. It is the second number of the *Azad Patrika*, which followed the orthodox Congress line. By this time accounts of the progress of the movement elsewhere had been received, so that a news section could be produced. Source: as for patrika II.
5. This much longer patrika was discovered by the authorities circulating in Bhavnagar City in late August 1942. It appears to have been produced soon after the start of the movement, and it follows the orthodox Congress line. Source: E. C. Gibson to Political Department, Delhi, 1 September 1942, IOL C. R. R. R/1/1/3804.



# THE REVOLT OF AUGUST 1942 IN EASTERN UP AND BIHAR

GYANENDRA PANDEY

## I

The 'Quit India' Movement lives on in popular memory in India as the high point of the struggle for independence from the British. It fits well into a vision of history that runs from one violent outbreak to another:<sup>1</sup> from the glorious sacrifices of the rebels of 1857, to those of the Chapekar brothers, to that of Bhagat Singh, and so on. As the *Fighters for Freedom: Who's Who*, published by the Government of UP, puts it for Ballia district:

It is in the fitness of things that Ballia which gave sepoy Mangal Pandey to the country... whose execution at Barackpur... on April 8, 1857 sparked off the First War of Independence, should play such an heroic role in the 'Quit India' movement as well. Some of those numerous immortals who were shot dead by the Police and the Military but live on for eternity, for in their death, the cause for which they laid down their lives derived greater strength and support and, *inter alia*, helped Ballia to earn the sobriquet of 'Revolutionary Ballia' in 1942....

(There follow the names of those who were killed or wounded in 1942).<sup>2</sup>

Underlying this popular history, and many scholarly ones, are assumptions regarding the process of the coming into being of an Indian 'nation'. Events like 'Quit India' are, in this view, only the most striking indications of the development of a unified national movement that advanced under the aegis of an enlightened leadership to encompass wider and wider circles of the Indian

population. The extraordinary popularity of a Gandhi and a Nehru is cited as proof of the ascendancy established over the broad masses by the nationalist leadership.

This era of Congress ascendancy is seen as beginning in the 1920s and lasting at least until the 1940s and '50s : it would appear to have been at its most resplendent around 1942. Much of the debate among writers on the Quit India Movement— regarding 'spontaneity' vs. 'organisation' or the degree of violence in this 'Congress rebellion', for instance— revolves in my view around this same question of Congress ascendancy or leadership. The effort of nationalist historians to highlight a degree of central direction and organization in the rebellion serves to demonstrate how the 'nation' united behind its leaders in 1942. So, too, it is argued that Gandhi had sanctioned the use of violence in this 'final struggle', and most of what happened was as he had wished it.

An American scholar, Paul Greenough has put the argument squarely in a recent article.

While it is customary to point out that this supposedly non-violent movement soon became very violent (he writes), the contradiction between non-violence in theory and violence in practice had been a regular feature of the earlier national *satyagrahas* which the Mahatma himself had led.

Thus, the outburst of 'rioting' and sabotage which followed Amery's broadcast on 10 August 1942 did not make the movement 'any the less Gandhian'. The underground literature of the period, which this scholar analyses for one district in southwest Bengal, was 'Gandhian through and through'.

In any case (he tells us), it was not *ahimsa* which was Gandhi's distinctive contribution to the movement in 1942; much more characteristic was the precept 'Do or Die', the call for ultimate sacrifices in what was intended to be 'the final struggle'.

The logic of this argument is a little unclear. The *mantra*, or precept, of 'Do or Die' and the principle of non-violence are not of the same order, and hence not strictly comparable. We may note in passing, too, that the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-21 was equally intended to be 'the final struggle', with the leadership holding out the promise of 'Swaraj in one year'. After all that has been written about the popular struggles of the years 1920-22, and Gandhi's own statements regarding his 'Himalayan blunder', it is

surprising to read the assertion that 'a movement that was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi could not stray too far from the issues, themes and symbols which Gandhi himself had articulated'.

Greenough observes that 'it is this straying which gave the Quit India (movement) much of its distinctive character and internal tension'<sup>3</sup>. Another historian would have been tempted to put it differently, and to describe the process as an appropriation by the people of the name and symbols of Gandhian nationalism for a politics that was essentially their own. For 'straying' implies the togetherness of a flock which has no real mind of its own, and to assume this is to beg the central questions that analysts of modern Indian history and society are still asking.

These questions concern the extent to which an integrated Indian nation had come into being by the 1940s, and the manner of its emergence. For while the strength of the Indian nation both as an idea and a reality is plain for all to see, its boundaries remain a matter of controversy.<sup>4</sup> It should be stressed that the debate is not only about the physical limits to the participation in the nationalist movement, but also about how the relationship between leaders and followers, between one group of participants and another and, indeed, between participant and non-participants, was conceived.

This paper begins with the more limited query : does the evidence from eastern UP and western Bihar support the view that the Quit India uprising was a 'Congress rebellion'? It goes on to investigate the question of the castes and classes that were mobilized for the nationalist struggle in 1942. It then returns to the issue of nation-building and leadership, of the relationship between different sections of Indian society at this, the hour of its most massive anti-imperialist struggle—the question, in other words, of the boundaries of the 'nation', both in practice and conceptually.

## II

The magnitude and force of the uprising that occurred over eastern UP and Bihar is now fairly well documented.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the region, as in other parts of India, urban *hartals* and demonstrations, mostly led by students, were followed by weeks of anti-British actions in the countryside that disrupted communications and successfully paralysed the administration in many areas. Numerous *thanas* were captured, and at least one district (Ballia) and a number of smaller localities came to be nominally under Congress rule for several days. The British retaliated with brutal repression by military and armed police units, and this may have

been the most significant phase of the entire movement in terms of the spreading of the nationalist message and deepening the hatred of the British.<sup>6</sup> Although open action by large crowds was thus ended, sabotage and propaganda activity was continued by small groups of 'guerillas' in the months and years that followed, and it was to be some time before the remoter *talukas* were brought back under British control.

Stunned by these events, many contemporary officials came to stress the 'brilliant organization and preparedness of Congress for a civil disobedience movement, which they seemed to turn on like a tap'.

With dramatic suddenness and meticulously precise planning [wrote one anxious Bihar official], the Congress Party had overnight [literally between the 9th and 10th of August 1942] disrupted every form of communication (except the radio) not merely between Bihar and the rest of India, but between Patna and other district headquarters, and even within districts and sub-divisions.<sup>7</sup>

There are, however, other opinions regarding how these events occurred. One, that comes from the pen of a political activist who was opposed to the Congress and the slogan of 'Quit India' at this time, is especially noteworthy. Rahul Sankrityayana, Kisan Sabha leader, Communist and Hindi litterateur, wrote in his diary on 10 August 1942 :

We shall take part in no such activity as would help the Japanese either directly or indirectly. At the same time we refuse to become weapons in the hands of this authoritarian regime. There is great enthusiasm among the people. There will certainly be disorder. And the regime will be glad of this.<sup>8</sup>

Sankrityayana travelled to Patna from Chapra on 11 August, and his account of events there from 11 to 13 August is at once an expression of surprise and a lament—surprise at the extraordinary response to the nationalist call; and lament at the fact that a disciplined party, an organized body of workers, was not present to channel the energies that were at hand. There was no leadership here, he observes repeatedly: 'Every man was his own leader'. A diary entry for 13 August reads :

The tide (of popular enthusiasm) has turned. Attacks on the *zamindars*, *mahajans* and traders in the villages will now be proposed... It is sad to see this. With the power that these people had captured yesterday, they could have done so much.<sup>9</sup>

Jai Prakash Narayan, who was to be hailed later on as 'the leader of the 1942 Revolution' agreed with this response when he said of what happened in 1942, 'On the one hand we gave a challenge to the British Government; on the other hand no programme was placed before us.'<sup>10</sup> In his second letter 'To All Fighters for Freedom', sent out from the underground in September 1943, he wrote that what occurred in August 1942 was 'certainly' a Congress rebellion, although Gandhi and the Congress had not chalked out any detailed programme for it. Addressing the detractors of the Quit India Movement, he asked,

What is it that those who deny the authority of the Congress to the struggle would desire to have happened on the 9th of August after (the) cowardly attack on our leaders?... was it expected that only protest meetings should have been held demanding the release of the arrested leaders...? (Or were) the people... expected to rise in answer to the British offensive...?<sup>11</sup>

The rhetorical question was indication enough of how 'the people' in different parts of the country had to take matters into their own hands and decide on the methods of struggle to be adopted after 9 August 1942.

Let me clarify that the point at issue here is how closely the Congress organization and leadership controlled and directed the Quit India uprising,<sup>12</sup> and not whether Congress leaders, and Mahatma Gandhi in particular, had created the mood for the struggle— which was all that the colonial bureaucracy and intelligence services were able to establish through their detailed investigations into the 'Congress responsibility for the disturbances.' As to moods, one could argue that Gandhi had once again demonstrated how closely in tune he was with the masses, and that he had sensed their changing temper as much as he conveyed to them his own. Jawaharlal Nehru, at any rate, thought as much when he wrote: 'It was clear that, whether Gandhiji was right or wrong, he had crystallized the prevailing mood of the people.'<sup>13</sup>



As regards more direct guidance, the colonial authorities too, whatever may have been their immediate response or much later recollections, were hard put to it to identify the seditious 'organizations' and 'leaders' that allegedly lay behind the revolt. In numerous files sent up from the provinces to the Government of India, we find the statement that 'none' of those convicted in the given cases was 'a well-known Congressman' or the marginal noting that there was nothing 'of much use for publicity purposes' in the particular file.<sup>14</sup>

The question of central control and local organization apart, the evidence from 1942 is by no means unambiguous as to what Gandhi had sanctioned or the Congress ordained. There were many contradictory stances and many conflicting tones in the statements and messages put out by different Congress leaders at different times and in different parts of the country, and indeed in the speeches and writings of individual leaders too. Gandhi's own language was distinctly more militant in the aftermath of what he called 'the Cripps fiasco'<sup>15</sup> than ever before. Thus he wrote in April 1942, 'Whatever the consequences... to India, her real safety and Britain's too lies in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India.' And in May :

I waited and waited until the country should develop the non-violent strength necessary to throw off the foreign yoke. But my attitude has undergone a change. I feel that I cannot afford to wait... That is why I have decided that even at certain risks, which are evidently involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery.

And again, 'I have waited long and I can wait no longer'.<sup>16</sup> Then in July, just after the Congress Working Committee had approved a draft resolution on mass civil disobedience, Gandhi declared that courting imprisonment was 'too soft a thing.' 'We had, no doubt, made it a business to court imprisonment up to now, but there will be no such thing this time. My intention is to make the thing as short and swift as possible'.<sup>17</sup>

Yet by July, as Nehru has recorded,<sup>18</sup> Gandhi's attitude had softened a little: he was willing to countenance the continued presence of Allied troops in India and wrote more often of international perspectives on India's struggle for freedom. Perhaps more significant, for the present discussion, is the fact that Gandhi never gave up his insistence on non-violence at any time during this period. In an interview to *The Hindu* in June 1942, he said that a national government,

if it is to be broad-based upon the will of the people...must be predominantly non-violent. Anyway, up to my last breath, I hope I shall be found working to that end.<sup>19</sup>

In his speech before the debate on the 'Quit India' resolution at the AICC session on 7 August, he said,

I may tell you that I am the same man today that I was in 1920. The only difference is that I am much-stronger in certain things now than I was in 1920.

One of those things was the principle of non-violence. 'I stick to the principle of non-violence as I did before. If you are tired of it then you need not come with me.' Further,

at a time when I am about to launch the biggest fight in my life there can be no hatred for the British in my heart. May be that in a moment of anger they might do things which might provoke you. Nevertheless you should not resort to violence and put non-violence to shame.

And again, 'Non-violence is a matchless weapon which can help everyone'. In conclusion,

I want you to adopt non-violence as a matter of policy. With me it is a creed, but so far as you are concerned I want you to accept it as policy. As disciplined soldiers you must accept it *in toto* and stick to it when you join the struggle.<sup>20</sup>

For an important section of the top Congress leadership, at least, non-violence remained an essential part of the Congress programme. Among them was Nehru who wrote in his *Discovery of India*,

If the Congress, forgetful of its creed, had previously given even a hint of violent action, there is no doubt that the violence that actually took place (in August-September 1942) would have increased a hundred-fold. But no such hint had been given, and, indeed, the last message of the Congress had again emphasized the importance of non-violence in action.<sup>21</sup>

The other point to note is that in spite of the extraordinary circumstances in which it was to occur and the fiery rhetoric of

many Congress leaders, the projected civil disobedience movement was seen, at least initially, as being in line with those that had gone before. To Gandhi was given the task of determining 'the steps to be taken' and launching the struggle at the appropriate time. As the Mahatma himself noted in his speech following the adoption of the civil disobedience programme,

the actual struggle does not commence this moment. You have only placed all your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand. That process is likely to take two or three weeks.

Later on in the same speech, he urged students to loudly proclaim their adherence to the Congress in the interim, 'till the time that I frame a programme for the struggle'.<sup>22</sup>

This 'programme' too was being thought of along lines that were now fairly traditional in Congress *satyagrahas*. In the confidential 'draft instructions for civil resisters' circulated to members of the Congress Working Committee on 4 August 1942, Gandhi suggested, *inter alia*,

The salt tax causes great hardship to the poor. Therefore, wherever salt can be made, poor people may certainly manufacture it for themselves and risk the penalty. Land tax is due only to a government which we recognize as our own. It is long since we have mentally ceased to recognize the existing Government as such, but until now we have not gone to the length of refusing the payment of land tax because we felt that the country was not prepared to go so far. But the time has now come when those who have the courage and are prepared to risk their all, should refuse to pay it.<sup>23</sup>

It is worth recording that this suggestion was relayed in the Congress instructions and notices that were put out in different parts of UP and Bihar, as elsewhere in the country.<sup>24</sup> Yet, except in one or two places, the occasion did not arise for people in northern India to carry it out.

Gandhi's 'draft instructions for civil resisters' were not published until June 1945. But in view of the attacks on Government property of all kinds that ensued in many areas a week after this 'draft' was drawn up, it is interesting to note Gandhi's current line of thoughts regarding Government servants :

Those employed in Government offices, Government factories, railways, post offices, etc., may not participate in the hartal, because our object is to make it clear that we will never tolerate Japanese, Nazi or Fascist invasion, nor British rule. Therefore, we shall not for the present interfere in the above-mentioned Government departments.<sup>25</sup>

In his speech to the AICC after the passage of the 'Quit India' resolution, which was published at the time, Gandhi's emphasis was different but the tone was not much more aggressive. In the discussions he proposed to initiate with the Viceroy, he said, the latter might offer the abolition of the salt tax, 'the drink evil', etc. 'But I will say: "Nothing less than freedom"'. The Mahatma's advice to Government servants was still this. They were free, if they preferred, not to resign their posts yet.

The late Justice Ranade did not resign his post, but he openly declared that he belonged to the Congress... I would ask all the Government servants to follow in the footsteps of Ranade and to declare their allegiance to the Congress as an answer to the secret circular issued by Sir Frederick Puckle.<sup>26</sup>

This psychological break— the assertion that one was no longer a 'bond-slave'— was in fact the one, specific positive move that Gandhi suggested in this, his last speech before his arrest.

Every one of you [every *satyagrahi*; every supporter of Congress] should, from this moment onwards, consider yourself a free man or woman, and act as if you are free and are no longer under the heel of this imperialism.

Given the electric atmosphere of the times, the significance of this suggestion should of course not be under-estimated.

In addition, Gandhi gave out his now-famous *mantra*:

You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is: 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt.

The message was repeated at the time of his arrest at 5 a.m. on 9 August 1942 :

Everyone is free to go to the fullest length under *ahimsa*. Complete deadlock by *strikes and other non-violent means*.

*Satyagrahis* must go out to die, not to live. They must seek and face death. It is only when individuals go out to die that the nation will survive. *Karengē ya marengē* (We shall 'do or die').<sup>27</sup>

What needs to be stressed is that there were statements here that were open to different interpretations. Gandhi's message, assisted by Amery's broadcast alleging that the Congress leadership had decided upon a programme of disruption and sabotage, and by nationalist newspapers, hurriedly printed, and hand-written circulars and leaflets, and word of mouth, was translated in far-flung parts of the country into a programme to disrupt all communications, paralyse the administration and set up 'independent' governments wherever possible.

### III

The rest, one might say, is history. But it is worth our while to examine this history from the other end, and investigate how the Congress message was received in the towns and villages. Whatever our judgement of Gandhi's 'actual' position at this time on the question of violence vs. non-violence— shall we ever know?— and whatever the situation in a province like Gujarat, where it is said that Vallabhbhai Patel had before his arrest issued detailed instructions regarding a programme of sabotage and disruption,<sup>28</sup> it is fairly clear that there was in UP and Bihar little certainty about the proposed Congress programme right up to the moment of the arrest of the leaders in Bombay. This is demonstrated by the pattern of events in village Sherpur in the Mohammadabad *thana*<sup>29</sup> (police circle) of Ghazipur district.

Nothing very spectacular appears to have taken place in this district for a few days after the arrest of the Congress leaders— until the arrival, that is, of small groups of students from Banaras Hindu University (BHU). However, the news of the arrest of the leaders in Bombay, relayed by all the newspapers, and of the arrest of local Congress leaders in Ghazipur on 10 August, had spread like wild-fire. According to a Congress history of the district, talk of 'Quit India' had been in the air for quite some time before this.<sup>30</sup> Now an event like the arrest of Vishwanath Sharma in Reotipur, a village linked by close kinship ties with Sherpur, helped in the rapid spread of the 'Do or Die' message in the Sherpur-Mohammadabad area.

The Congress history tells us, further, that soon after this, Ram

Swarup Upadhyaya and Vasishth Narain Sharma brought the 'programme' from the Provincial Congress Committee, and feverish preparations began in all the villages.<sup>31</sup> Old 'freedom-fighters' of Sherpur, however, recall that a few days after the AICC meeting and the arrest of Congress leaders in Bombay, Ram Datt Rai of the nearby village of Derhgawan, came with the 'Congress message' from Ghazipur town. A couple of days later, Sitaram Rai of Sherpur, a student at BHU, returned from Banaras bringing the news that 'destruction' of Government property was the order of the day. Other students of the area, studying at BHU, in the DAV High School, Ghazipur, and elsewhere, followed. And 'the people's enthusiasm soared.'

On or about 16 August, a huge meeting was held in Derhgawan. It was attended by men from Reotipur, Sherpur and numerous other villages. Among them was a contingent from village Patkania, led by Bansh Narain Mishra. 'Patkania village had become the Bardoli of Ghazipur in 1942,' says the Congress history of the district, having the day before this destroyed the Court of Wards office in the village, launched a campaign for the non-payment of rent, and declared the village 'independent'. At Derhgawan, on 16 August, excitement mounted as the crowd swelled. Ultimately, when the crowd moved off, chanting nationalist slogans, sections of it advanced to Nagesar, where the railway station was destroyed, and then further to Dildarnagar, where the Police Station was captured and the railway station and post office looted and destroyed. It was dark before the crowds finally dispersed.

The 'message of destruction' had, however, spread some time before this. Vishwanath Singh Gahmari had led a large procession of students to the Kotwali (major police station) in the district headquarters, singing :

*Kya Bhagat Singh, Bhaiyon, yun hi bhulaya jayega?  
Besh keemat Lal<sup>32</sup> kya yun hi lutaya jayega?  
Kaat kar sar Jarge ka, aur phunk kar Inland ko,  
Nok par bhale ke Churchill ghumaya jayega.  
Bank Imperial, khajane, dak khane loot lo;  
Kotwali aur kachehri bhi jalaya jayega.<sup>33</sup>*

(Will Bhagat Singh be forgotten so easily, Comrades?  
Will our treasured Lal have been sacrificed for nothing?  
We shall cut off (king) George's head, and finish England  
with fire and the sword,  
And hoist Churchill aloft on the point of a spear.

Go out and loot the Government banks, treasuries and post offices;  
Police stations and courts too will be razed to the ground.)

On the three days preceding the Derhgawan meeting, crowds had already carried out attacks on rail tracks and railway stations at Ghazipur Ghat, Nagesar, Tarighat, Ankuspur and elsewhere. The action in Patkania village on 15 August followed in this line. On that day, a crowd of perhaps 100-150 people, shouting 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai', had burnt the Court of Wards camp in the village— 'a small thatched hut with reed tatters on both sides'.

The camp was used only for occasional sittings, but that very morning a Qurk Amin (local revenue official responsible for attachment proceedings) had attached the cattle of certain Ahirs of the village, who retaliated by forcibly releasing the cattle. In the criminal case arising out of this incident, which was heard in 1943, the judge declared that the evidence showed that

Ahirs were also present there. Under the circumstances it can be probable that the Ahirs who had immediate grievance on account of the attachment had the chief hand in causing the fire.

The *ziladar* for the Court of Wards in Patkania testified in evidence that the 'mob' had said, 'The British Government has ceased to exist. Rents were not to be paid to the zemindars as it was Swaraj.'<sup>34</sup>

However, the 'message of destruction' had not simply replaced Gandhi's principle of non-violence. In many places the two co-existed uneasily. One such was the Sherpur-Mohammadabad region, where the major actions took place after the 16 August meeting in Derhgawan. On the afternoon of 17 August, Dr. Shivpujan Rai of Sherpur, a thirty year old practitioner of homeopathic medicine, had led a crowd composed chiefly of youths from Sherpur, Hariharpur and other nearby habitations, which captured the Government Post Office and the lower court at Mohammadabad. They slashed the wires to cut off communication between Mohammadabad and other 'strongholds of the foreign Government', and burnt all the papers in the lower court. After this Shivpujan Rai asked the crowd to disperse and announced that the national flag would be hoisted on the Mohammadabad *tahsil* building at the same time on the following day.

The exchange that then followed between leader and followers is described thus by the Ghazipur Congress history :

A voice from the crowd shouted out: 'There is ample time still. The number of policemen at the *tahsil* today is also small. This task should be finished today.' Dr (Shivpujan Rai) was offended by this statement, and he challenged the speaker with the following words: 'We have raised our banner in order to rid people of the fear of the police and the army. We are not going to be terrified by bullets. The flag will be hoisted on the *tahsil* tomorrow, as planned. The possibility of the arrival of (more) policemen and troops makes no difference.'

The crowd grew tense. It is an old military maxim to attack the enemy when his forces are weak. But Shivpujan Rai was confronted by another task. *Yug-purush* (the Great Man of the Age) Mahatma Gandhi, having preached the gospel of non-violence for 20 years, and having courageously called on the British to quit India, was now in jail. His principles and his careful decision had to be translated into action. The yogi had been put behind bars, his followers had to complete his penance (fulfil his vow). There was no room for discussion, Dr (Shivpujan) declared— 'We do not want victory at the cost of the principles of the *Yug-purush*.'

The crowd dispersed. The *tahsil* officials had become alert. The guards were increased. More guns were brought in, and cleaned...<sup>35</sup>

Heavy rainfall from the night of 17 August flooded the area in and around Sherpur. 'At such a time,' says the Congress account, 'even the starving would not venture out in search of food.' But at the appointed hour, Shivpujan Rai and twenty other young men of the village set out on the march of five or six miles to Mohammadabad, each one carrying the tricolour and raising slogans for independence.

Sherpur, a large village of some 20,000 people (of whom 40 to 50 percent were Bhumihars), had a history of nationalist activity of which it could be proud. In 1920–21, a large number of young men from the Bhumihar landowning families of the village had left school, contributions had been collected for the Congress, and some local volunteers had taken a more active part in the Non-co-operation Movement and suffered imprisonment for it. A number of Congressmen of the village had gone to jail during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930–34, and Nageswar Rai had been 'dictator' of the Ghazipur Congress for a while in 1930. Shivpujan Rai and several others had been jailed again in 1941 for their part in the 'individual *satyagraha*' campaign, which took the



form of propaganda against the War— '*na ek pai, na ek bhai* (not a penny, nor a brother) will we give for this English war'. Now, as Shivpujan Rai and his small band of followers made their way through the main habitation of the village, they were joined by others. Soon there were hundreds in the procession. 'Small boats flying the tri-colour floated on the water. The riverbank reverberated with slogans. From the far bank the procession took the road.'<sup>36</sup>

The numbers grew as groups of people joined in from villages on the way. Just after they had passed the village of Suratpur, a short distance from Mohammadabad, Shivpujan Rai stopped and spoke to his followers. 'It was necessary,' in the words of the Congress history,

to make the programme absolutely clear to the assembled crowd. (Hence) Dr Shivpujan addressed the assembly.... 'The future of the nation is in your hands. You must do nothing which you may regret in time to come. You must all leave your *lathis* at this point, and proceed with me in the manner of totally non-violent (*satyagrahis*).' The crowd grew agitated. They thought of the bullets they would probably have to face. They hesitated at the thought of leaving behind even their *lathis*. Dr (Shivpujan Rai) spoke more sternly now: 'Brave friends, this is the time of testing. The enemy's guns are trained upon us. A ferocious police force is standing at the ready. We can anticipate a rain of bullets. This (police) demonstration has not been arranged simply in order to instil fear. Truly, the eyes of these men, who have turned traitors out of self-interest, are murderous. Non-violence is being tested by fire, and you must come out true. We cannot go there with the thirst for revenge in our hearts. It is not by killing but by dying that we shall attain our goal. The leader of the nation has ordered this. We cannot violate his wishes.' The tension in the crowd increased further, but as one man they accepted this directive. The *lathis* were thrown down, and the (completely) unarmed crowd marched to the gates of the tahsil.<sup>37</sup>

'Not by killing but by dying' is a significant appeal ('The leader of the nation has ordered this.'). For it is commonly said by surviving participants of the Quit India Movement in northern India that the people had converted Mahatma Gandhi's slogan of '*Karo ya maro*' (Do/Achieve or Die) into one of '*Karo ya maaro*' (Achieve or Kill).<sup>38</sup>

At Mohammadabad, it happened to be one of the bi-weekly market days, and with many more joining the procession, the crowd swelled according to some estimates to 10,000. However, only a section of this crowd marched on the *tahsil*. Here, Shivpujan Rai raised the slogan, '*Police hamare bhai hain*' ('The policemen are our brothers'), and the crowd followed suit, 'Policemen are our brothers', 'Englishmen, quit India'. But the Mahammadabad constabulary stood firm against the nationalist demonstrators. When the crowd refused to obey orders to disperse, the police opened fire. Shivpujan Rai and five other men were killed on the spot. Two others died later in hospital. On the following day, the police and officials, afraid of retaliation by the local populace, fled to Ghazipur city.

A manuscript history of the freedom struggle in Sherpur, being compiled by old 'freedom-fighters' of the village, and judicial court records corroborate this account substantially, though they disagree somewhat on the numbers of people involved. The court records confirm that the crowd attacking the *tahsil* dispersed only when the twenty or twenty-five armed policemen on duty had opened fire, killing and wounding a number of people, and that as they withdrew the crowd took away two muskets from the guard by force. They tell us, in addition, that the crowd then re-grouped to attack the *tahsil* again, but an additional police force arrived just then and the crowd finally scattered, still chanting 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai'.<sup>39</sup>

The Sherpur history quotes extracts from Shivpujan Rai's speech on the way to Mohammadabad *tahsil* that are very similar to those given above. However, the variations in some of the phrases recalled are interesting, suggesting as they do that a rather more aggressive nationalist tone went together with the plea for non-violence.

If we take our life in our hands and think of death as a plaything (which must come one day), and thus advance towards our goal, then victory is assured. With this determination, we shall despatch the handful of Englishmen in this country across the seven seas. We shall rest only when we have driven them away. (Applause) One point, you must get clear. It is possible (probable?) that on advancing with the (national) flag I shall be mowed down by bullets. But you must stand by my side... and, stepping over my corpse, keep on advancing until the tricolour flies on the *tahsil* building.

According to this version Shivpujan Rai then asked the entire assembly to lay down all weapons, including *lathis* and even sticks, excepting only flag-sticks, and to observe the strictest truth and non-violence. He urged them to refrain from throwing even a single stone: 'Remember that that stone will wound me first'.<sup>40</sup>

This history tells us also that 18 August 1942, the day of the attack on the Mohammadabad *tahsil*, was the day of the Mahavir (Hanuman) festival— it was 'transformed into a festival for the liberation of the country'. At the Mohammadabad market, more and more people joined the procession, more and more Gandhi caps and Congress flags appeared, and the slogans were raised: '*Bajrang Bali ki jai*', '*Gandhiji ki jai*'— 'Victory' to Bajarang Bali (Hanuman, a deity symbolizing strength and cunning in war, the patron-god of north Indian wrestlers) and 'Victory' to the apostle of non-violence, a remarkable appropriation.

As they marched, the nationalist youth sang:

*Shahidon ke khoon ka asar dekh lena;*  
*Mitayenge zalim ka ghar dekh lena.*  
*Jo khud garaj goli chalayenge ham par,*  
*To kadmon men unka hi sar dekh lena.*<sup>41</sup>

(See the results of the self-sacrifice of martyrs. We shall destroy the refuge of the tyrant. And if self-seekers should fire upon us, you will find their (decapitated) heads at our feet.)

The most popular slogans in the Sherpur contingent were: '*Jamuna Gir ka badla lenge*' ('We shall take revenge for Jamuna Gir', a young man of Sherpur, then studying in the D.A.V. High School in Ghazipur city, who was seriously injured in police firing, and then arrested, in the attack on Ghauspur aerodrome a few days before this), and '*Inqilab Zindabad*' ('Long live revolution'). Afraid of retaliation, the police and officials fled to Ghazipur city on the nineteenth. On the following two days crowds ranging from several hundred to two thousand and chanting '*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai*', attacked and looted the Police Station and the *tahsil*, the Government seed store and the railway station at Yusufpur-Mohammadabad.<sup>42</sup> As a couple of those involved in the march on Mohammadabad *tahsil* on 18 August recalled, whereas the leadership was Gandhi's, the spirit was that of Bhagat Singh.

## IV

Without entering into a detailed account of the actions in other places, it is possible to establish that this coexistence of contradictory tendencies was widespread at this time. Readily available reports point to the tension that existed between the spirit of violence and that of non-violence. More than that they indicate repeated disagreement between local 'leaders' and followers—a situation that was often perceived as reflecting the 'leadership of the mob' or no leadership at all. The point is illustrated well by Rahul Sankrityayana's description of events in Patna on 11 August which we have referred to in an earlier section, and which bears quotation at length.

Excitement was at a height. Students were taking out processions. The news of (police) firing in Ahmedabad, Bombay, Poona and other places added fuel to the fire. In the afternoon (on 11 August) a procession began. Communist students had sought to restrain their fellows, and succeeded until then, but the news of firing had added greatly to the agitation of the students at large. They were now ready to do anything. A large procession went towards the Secretariat. The crowd swelled to 10,000. The police opened fire. Three men [boys] died on the spot, and a large number were wounded... At midnight seven corpses were taken out in procession. Who could have been so stone-hearted as not to have wept over the deaths of these youths? At places where the streets were lit up, one could see the corpses bedecked with flowers and a crowd of inestimable size following behind. The hearts of all who were there were filled with sorrow and with anger. For the people of Patna, these happenings proved to be the last straw. A complete *hartal* was observed on the 12th. But to say that is to say nothing about the condition of Patna on that day. It was a day when all signs of British rule disappeared from Patna. No *rickshas* or *ekkas* were plied. The students were no longer the leaders, leadership had passed to the *rickshā*-pullers, *ekka*-drivers and other such people whose political knowledge extended only this far—that the British were their enemies. Chandrashekhar and other Communists sought to restrain the students, but they were condemned as the lackeys of the British. I went to one or two hostels myself, to

no avail. In the afternoon a procession began, but it had no leaders. A huge meeting took place. Some Congress leaders urged the assembled people to join the *kranti* (lit. 'revolution', 'here 'rebellion' or 'movement'). The audience responded by saying, '*Lecture sunne ki zarurat nahin. Chalo kaam karen.*' ['We have no use for your lectures. Let us take (immediate) action'.] The cutting down of telegraph, telephone and electric wires then began all over the city. There was an [electric] pole near the house where I was staying. A man climbed up on that and smashed the China-clay holders. Pt. Yadunandan Sharma and I were watching all this from the roof of the Kisan Sabha office. Post-offices were being set on fire, letter-boxes destroyed. The shopkeepers too were very happy. People stopped a lorry full of prisoners and released all of them. Babu Rajendra (Prasad)'s words were coming true. On that day, every man was his own leader. I saw that the *kranti* (revolt) had produced such a spirit among the people that there was not a selfish thought in their actions. Bricks had been piled up in front of our house to stop the passage of military lorries. This was of course a childish hope, given that military lorries can negotiate great pits and ditches. Yes, pedestrians were liable to injure themselves when walking that way in the dark. But till one o'clock at night, I saw a man standing there and saying to passers-by '*Kirpa karke idhar se aaiye*' (Please come this way). I was struck particularly by the word '*kirpa*',<sup>43</sup> for the use of such words is yet uncommon among the uneducated classes. *Kranti* (revolution) was not achieved, for no one [no party?] was there to bring it about, but there could be no doubt of the presence of a revolutionary atmosphere. The power of the people of Patna had destroyed the established government—but it only finished it off, leaving a vacuum in its place. Those students who had incited the workers of the town and brought them to this stage, now had no programme to suggest to them.<sup>44</sup>

By the evening of 13 August, according to Sankrityayana, the enthusiasm of the townsfolk was waning. By the 14th, many students had left the city, and *ricks*ha-pullers and *ekka*-drivers, dependent on daily earnings, were gradually returning to work.

We may note, first, that official accounts amply confirm this picture of happenings in Patna. Referring to the police firing outside the Secretariat on 11 August, the Governor of Bihar wrote.

Though the firing checked the attack the crowd went back in an ugly mood in the evening and through the night engaged in widespread sabotage and road obstruction, the thoroughness of which had to be seen to be believed. Telegraph poles complete with their full equipment of wires were pulled over and branches of trees a foot and over in diameter were chopped down. This was not the work of five minutes or an hour but nevertheless no information came into headquarters that this wholesale destruction was going on.

In view of this unprecedented outbreak, the authorities called out the troops. But—

Pending reinforcement (of the small contingent of troops in the local cantonment) we could not take the offensive, the more so that on the evening of 11th one company of troops was detached for duty at Arrah (headquarters of Shahabad district) from which a very urgent call for assistance had been received.

It was only after the arrival of another battalion on 12/13 August that the British commenced

offensive action. Patrol trains with troops moved both East and West and strong patrols pushed through the Patna bazar... removing road blocks, breaking up opposition and extricating Europeans...<sup>45</sup>

Rahul Sankrityayana's account of these events is fascinating for several reasons. It reflects, for instance, the many contrary pulls on his own mind. 'Who could have been so stone-hearted as not to have wept over the deaths of these youths?... The hearts of all who were there were filled with sorrow and with anger.' Here is an echo of the Sherpur slogan, '*Jamuna gir ka badla lenge*,' 'from a man who believed that the Congress movement was quite misplaced at this time. Notice, too, his description of the exchange that took between 'Congress leaders' and the people at the 'huge meeting' on 12 August, where the leaders were told, 'We have no use for (your) lectures. Let us take action.'

What emerges most clearly from Sankrityayana's account, however, is a dedicated Communist's dismay at the anarchic nature of this rebellion—at the lack of leadership, of central organization, of a programme. '*Kranti*' (revolution) was not achieved, for no one (no party, no leadership) was there to bring it

about... The power of the people had destroyed the established Government, but it had only finished it off, leaving a vacuum in its place.' Sankrityayana's understanding of the phases through which the makeshift leadership that there was passed, is equally interesting. Beginning with 'student leaders', 'leadership... passed to the *ricksha*-pullers, *ekka*-drivers and other such people whose political knowledge extended only this far—that the British were their enemies.' On 12 August, there were students taking the lead in places, 'a procession... (which) had no leaders', and 'some Congress leaders' at a mass meeting who were told what to do by the assembled audience. 'Babu Rajendra (Prasad)'s words [a reference to the widespread belief that the Congress leaders had urged that every Indian should be his own leader]<sup>46</sup> were coming true. On that day, every man was his own leader.'

'Quit India' demonstrations developed in a similar way in the old town of Sahasram in Shahabad district. Following a strike in the High School and *hartal* in the town on 11 August, the civil court was raided on 12 August. That day, the word spread that a nationalist crowd had captured a train at Arrah, the headquarters town of the district, and was moving towards the south-west along the Light Railway destroying and 'looting' all stations on the way. Rumour had it that the train had stopped for the night at the station before Sahasram.

This news appears to have completely changed the temper of the town. On 13 August a 'mob' (of 200 students, according to officials) raided the railway station, burnt papers and cut the telegraph wires. But the 'mob' had swelled to 1000, by the same officials' admission, by the time that it raided the civil court and boys from the local High School— after a 'silent' confrontation with the Sub-Divisional Officer, H. B. Martin— hoisted the national flag on the building. The Indian policemen present, too, showed their sympathy for the crowd by refusing to carry out Martin's orders to open fire. That afternoon, wrote Martin,

the more violent chaps from the *mofussil* [i.e. people from the surrounding rural areas] arrived and burnt the two railway stations. I suggested that the police might be asked to come out and at least try and stop them; but the havildar explained that he had long experience of such matters and he knew that if we attempted to open fire on the mob we should all infallibly be killed.<sup>47</sup>

Officials spent the night of 13 August in a funk, as rumours sped about of 'criminals' pouring into the town and plans being laid to

assault Government officers as well as buildings. Martin sent an urgent message to Arrah asking for military support, and a force of 20 soldiers under a Second Lieutenant reached Sahasram the following morning. This force opened fire on nationalist demonstrators at two different places. But even then officials did not have things all their own way. 'We had quite a lot of trouble arresting some students and then a largish crowd went off to the station to burn a military petrol dump,' Martin reported. The Sub-Divisional Officer gave chase in a lorry, accompanied by 12 soldiers and a non-commissioned officer. What happened then is best recounted in his own words:

We got to the station all right but couldn't disperse the crowd. When we tried to get back we found that they had put a barricade of *bullock carts* across the road and were lined up on either side to pelt us with *stones*. So we had to dismount and remove the carts while the others *covered us with fire*, which was necessarily *at close range*. *We went on and on firing* without really getting the crowd to move out of the way. One of them got up near enough to give the officer a crack on the head with a *lathi* before he shot him with his *revolver*. Altogether we had to fire 43 shots before the *truck* could get through and they were still pursuing up closely when we did get away.<sup>48</sup>

Veritably the world turned upside down with bullock carts, stones and *lathis* overcoming motor truck, revolver and military firepower.

Seventeen people in all were injured in the firing (according to official figures). Three of them succumbed to their injuries in hospital. Their corpses were promptly taken out by the townsfolk in a large procession. Two constables who were seen on the way were beaten up. There was no other sign of British authority out on the streets. The officer commanding the military detachment that had come from Arrah had in fact declared the situation 'militarily untenable' and proposed to evacuate. What saved the day for the officials in the end was the fortunate arrival, that very evening, of a Company of Maratha Light Infantry on transfer from Calcutta to Rawalpindi, followed by another detachment of troops from Gaya.

Martin observed, in a letter written soon afterwards, that it was 'the nasty little students' of the English High School in the town who had started all the 'trouble'. Later on, he was to suggest that the 'organisers' of the movement had sent 'a strong detachment



from Patna University' to strengthen the hands of the local 'rioters', but added at the same time that 'the riots appeared to develop more or less spontaneously and details of what was likely to happen could hardly have been foreseen.'<sup>49</sup>

The *ad hoc* character of much of the local organisation of the revolt is confirmed by Niblett's celebrated account of events in Azamgarh district. He points, for example, to the importance of rumours of the arrival of students from BHU and of happenings in nearby or distant places. At Mohammadabad Gohna on 14 August, 'rumours were afloat that students from Benaras Hindu University had alighted in twos and threes at every station on the line to organise attacks on the Railway.' At Mau, where excitement was far greater, information was received later in the day that students from Banaras had set fire to Aunrihar Junction and were now proceeding to attack Mau which was the next important station on the line. Mau was in direct railway communication with Banaras, and 'alarming rumours were coming in of happenings there and at Allahabad.'<sup>50</sup> At the same time, as Chandan Mitra has noted, the Dambar Baba *ka mela* in Ballia district, just across the border from Azamgarh, was 'agog with rumours of what had been happening in neighbouring Azamgarh.'<sup>51</sup> This on 13 August, *before* any of the really major actions and confrontations had occurred in the latter district.

Niblett's reference to the crowds that approached Madhuban along the roads from Ghosi and Dohrighat, armed with 'lathis and spears' and some also with 'plough-shares, hammers, saws and spades,'<sup>52</sup> indicates the 'spontaneous' peasant organization in many of the actions. This is testified to, again, by the statement of Ramphal Dhanuk, a peasant of Bandgaon in Muzaffarpur district who was charged in a murder case arising out of the August rising and executed by hanging. 'On a Monday morning 17 or 18 days ago,' Ramphal Dhanuk said in the court on 10 September 1942,

I went to the field with ploughs and labourers. Bilas's son, Binda, who reads in the Darbhanga College and who is my co-villager unyoked my plough, stopped the ploughs and labourers of all persons and said, 'Officers are coming to Kothi Bazar [Pupari ?]. Let us all go and challenge them'. At 12 o'clock Binda again came to my house and asked me to accompany him. I, Narayan Sah, Sarjug Sah, and Sonelal Mandal went to Kothi Bazar with him and saw a mob of 4000 or 5000 people assembled at the bazar.

Ramphal named some of the more prominent people who were present, and noted that Pradip Singh had kept brickbats loaded on a cart and had remarked that 'the officers will have bombs and guns, we shall have brickbats, *lathis*, *belas*, swords, *garasas* and *bhalas*.'<sup>53</sup>

The background to this gathering is not without interest. At the outbreak of the Quit India uprising in north Bihar, Arjun Singh, the ruthless and unpopular *thanedar* (Police Station Officer) of Pupari *thana*, had fled to Sitamarhi. In the days that followed, presumably once the military had moved into action in this area, the rumour spread that Arjun Singh was coming back to Pupari on 24 August, accompanied by 23 lorries full of soldiers who would be let loose on the people. From the early hours of 24 August, villages from all around began to assemble and to wait for the arrival of Arjun Singh.

No Arjun Singh came that day but, perhaps purely by coincidence, a car arrived from the direction of Sitamarhi at about 2 or 3 p.m. In it were the Sub-Divisional Officer, a Police Inspector, a Havildar, an orderly and the driver. They were all dragged out of the car, and the Sub-divisional Officer and the driver were severely beaten up. When the Inspector and Havildar hid in a hut, Munia Mali of Mathurapur and Sundar Sur, son of Shital, a resident of Madhuban, set fire to the hut. In his statement Ramphal continues,

At this both men came out of the house, and I gave a lathi blow to the Inspector from behind and he fell down. I asked him to make the pistol over to me and he gave it to me. Taking the pistol, I ran away to my house. I heard on going home that the uncle of Sudarshan of Kothi Bazar had snatched away one gun from Munia Teli (?). I heard that Rambaran Rajput of Pachra had also secured guns.

All the officials who were in the car, except the orderly, appear to have been beaten to death by the furious crowd. But Arjun Singh and the administration got their own back in more than full measure, when in three different attacks, on 24 August, 26 August and 3 September, the military (9-10 lorry-loads of soldiers on each occasion) and police terrorized the villages in the region, killed and wounded numerous people, looted a number of shops and houses, and set fire to the village of Bandgaon reducing 300 homes to ashes.

## V

That the revolt was on a massive scale in many places in eastern UP and western Bihar and had substantial popular support all over the region is indicated by the very size of the Government's retaliatory forces and a wide body of other evidence. The officials' reports from the 'front' display a real sense of urgency and war. 'These are not attacks of *goondas* but by the general population,' the Commissioner of Gorakhpur Division, then camping in Azamgarh, wrote about events in that district. The immediate reactions of the District Magistrate of Azamgarh (Niblett), the Superintendent of Police (Wingfield) and the Commissioner (Ross), make interesting reading. 'The whole countryside around Madhuban is in revolt' (S.P., 16 August). 'Nothing but military intervention could now retrieve the situation' (D.M., night of 15 August). 'The whole countryside in east of district is in state of turmoil. Police unable to function and we are considering evacuating 2 or 3 *thanas*. Population generally not prepared to help Government. Out of touch with outside districts for a week... Situation is grave and we have not sufficient troops. Petrol also badly needed.' (Commissioner, 18 August, when a reinforcement of 172 troops had already arrived). By 27 August, the situation had improved for the officials. But Ross still reported that the re-establishment of control over rural *thanas* was not possible until the armed police contingent was greatly strengthened. One *thana* and two police outposts had been evacuated: in his opinion, these could not be re-occupied until considerable reinforcements arrived.<sup>54</sup>

We may compare with this the situation in and around Sahasram, and H. B. Martin's reactions to it. We have observed already that the Indian constables stationed in the town refused to open fire on nationalist demonstrators, that a practically unarmed crowd physically fought off the military detachment that had been sent from Arrah, and that open revolt ended only with the arrival of further military reinforcements. But some of the behind-the-scenes activities and responses of the Government officials are even more revealing of the prevailing atmosphere.

On the night of 13 August, when the situation appeared to be critical, Martin had sent his driver by road to Arrah with an urgent message asking for troops. On account of the unofficial nationalist policing of the highways, the driver was stopped at three different points on his journey. It is interesting to learn that he got through to Arrah by saying that he was a Congressman of the Rohtas Industries Ltd.<sup>55</sup>

The Rohtas Industries at Dalmianagar (Dehri-on-Sone, in

Shahabad district) had gone on strike from the night of 11 August. From early the next morning even the Power House was shut down, 'a thing,' officials reported, 'which had never happened before in previous strikes.' The officials believed that, with the regular leaders of the local Mazdur Sangh already behind bars or absconding since 9 August, it was the supervisory staff in the factories who were the instigators of the strike. The owner, S. P. Jain, himself appeared 'lukewarm about continuing the factories' at work.<sup>56</sup> Obviously news of the total strike in the Rohtas Industries had spread rapidly through the district, so that on 13 August a Government employee could get through to Arrah by pretending to be a Congressman from this centre of revolt.

Sahasram was 'saved' for the British by the chance arrival of a company of troops that was detained here because of the destruction of the railway line further west. But this did not automatically set the local officials' fears at rest. 'Since then,' wrote Martin,

Sasaram has been hotching with troops. It is now the headquarters of the Beds. and Herts. Battalion which is patrolling the Grand Trunk Road from Gaya to Moghal Serai... What will happen... when the troops go I don't know but I have a shrewd idea it will start all over again, only they will probably wait till the Japanese are actually attacking before they begin.<sup>57</sup>

The assertion of a sharp line separating 'us' and 'them' is noteworthy. It was a view that was expressed commonly, and often with considerable racial arrogance, by an English officialdom that felt extremely isolated and beleaguered at this time.<sup>58</sup>

Against all that, however, we must recognize the very serious limitations in popular participation in the Quit India Movement. While Gandhi had said, 'Declare yourselves free', and large numbers of people set out to do precisely that throughout Bihar and eastern UP, this never developed into a mass movement in the rest of UP— although students came out and demonstrations and *hartals* occurred in most towns and cities in the days immediately following the arrests of the Congress leaders. Perhaps the major explanation for this lies in the preparedness of the authorities, for they were clearly anticipating agitation in Allahabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Agra and other such places,<sup>59</sup> and the sharpness of their repressive action.

The very brevity of the revolt may also have contributed to the fact that labourers for the construction of aerodromes, etc., were readily available throughout most of this period, and that the

Government's recruitment drive continued successfully even in some of the most 'troubled' districts.<sup>60</sup> But the movement suffered from some other serious limitations, even in the areas of its greatest success.

The most obvious of these was the lack of Muslim participation. The Jamiatul-ulema-i-Hind had issued a declaration supporting the Quit India Movement,<sup>61</sup> and the All-India Momin Conference (the chief association of the large body of Muslim weavers in northern and central India) stayed on the Congress side all the way up to independence. But the *ulema* seemed no longer to carry quite as much weight as they once had in political matters, and the Momins appear to have extended no more than formal support. Years of sectarian strife, Muslim League propaganda against the Congress ministries, and British efforts to woo Muslim politicians and use the Muslim League as a counter-weight to the Congress, had left their mark. It was to the Muslim League that most Muslim activists in northern India now looked for leadership. And on 20 August, after a few days of watching and deliberation, the Working Committee of the Muslim League came out with a strong statement against any Muslim support for Congress' current 'civil disobedience' campaign.<sup>62</sup>

Gandhi, more far-sighted than most, worried a great deal about this issue in the weeks before August 1942. He devoted the bulk of his speech after the passage of the 'Quit India' resolution at the AICC session in Bombay to a discussion of Hindu-Muslim relations. It was the question which was 'uppermost in my heart', and 'with me a matter of life and death'. 'Time was when every Mussalman claimed the whole of India as his motherland'.

India is without doubt the homeland of all Mussalmans inhabiting this country. Every Mussalman should therefore cooperate in the fight for India's freedom...

If we Hindus and Mussalmans mean to achieve a heart unity..., we must first unite in the effort to be free from the shackles of this Empire. If Pakistan after all is to be a portion of India, what objection can there be for Mussalmans against joining this struggle for India's freedom.

But the times were more critical than ever before. 'Freedom cannot now wait for the realization of communal unity.' Therefore, another kind of caution became necessary. 'In the coming revolution, Congressmen will sacrifice their lives in order to protect the Mussalman against a Hindu's attack and *vice versa*.'<sup>63</sup>

In the event, the period was noticeably free of any instances of sectarian strife. But it was not marked by any substantial Muslim

participation in the Quit India Movement either. The Muslims have remained 'severely', 'strictly' aloof, the Governments of UP and Bihar reported. In UP, where students 'practically everywhere' were involved in the demonstrations, Aligarh Muslim University stood out as a pointed exception. 'Muslims except possibly Communists have taken no part and appear anxious to continue studies'.<sup>64</sup>

In the long lists of those who were jailed for their part in the movement in Banaras, Azamgarh and Ghazipur districts, we find the names of two, ten and sixteen Muslims respectively. Among the ten from Azamgarh were eight men from the prominent weaving centre of Maunath Bhanjan (or Mau), including the local Congress leader, Maulvi Abdul Latif Nomani. Yet even Abdul Latif, a teacher of Arabic in the Mufta-ul-uloom Madrasa and, after independence, its Principal, who had joined the Congress at the time of the Khilafat agitation, was ambivalent about the nationalist demand at this stage. A knowledgeable official described him as President of the Mau Congress 'but willing when it suits his purpose to be a Muslim communalist'. Arrested with other Congress leaders in August 1942, he was released after three days on the undertaking that he would take no part in the movement.<sup>65</sup> From Mubarakpur, the other major cloth-producing centre of the district, where several Muslims had gone to jail for their part in the Khilafat-Non-co-operation Movement of 1920-21, no one was jailed in 1942.<sup>66</sup>

## VI

If the Muslims of UP and Bihar kept away from the Quit India Movement partly because their major political organizations had adopted a clearly anti-Congress position by this time, there were other communities whose participation was peripheral on account of the nature of their relations with those who provided the bulk of the Congress support. As we have noticed, it was the students from rural backgrounds, most of them coming from relatively well-to-do, upper-caste families, who provided the spearhead of the movement all over this region. The prominence of young men from the *zamindari* castes, in this area chiefly Brahmans, Bhumihars and Rajputs, is attested to by a wide variety of evidence— from the report of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Begusarai (Munger district) that 'the young men of villages, specially the Bhumihars had an inherent tendency to work as volunteers under Congress flag on any occasion',<sup>67</sup> to the lists of

'freedom-fighters', prepared from jail and court records by the provincial Governments in independent India.

Table 1 provides a caste-wise distribution of those who were convicted for their part in the Madhuban, Tarwa and Kajha Kothi *kands*<sup>68</sup> in Azamgarh district in 1942.

Jail lists are only a rough and ready guide to those that took part in popular actions, for the identification of participants by those under attack, or others standing by, must always be a chancy business. The odds are that well-known members of the local

Table 1

Caste	Madhuban	Tarwa	Kajha
Rajput	10	31	31
Brahman	17	10	8
Bhumihar <sup>a</sup>	1	—	1
Bania <sup>b</sup>	3	2	—
Ahir	9	16	1
Koeri	5	—	5
Mal	5	—	—
Kahar	—	—	3
Lonia	7	—	2
Majhi	5	—	—
Teli	5	1	—
Bhar	5	9	—
Kandu	2	—	1
Barnwal	—	2	—
Harijan <sup>c</sup>	4	1	—
Muslim	2	—	—
Others	4	3	1
Unidentified	10	—	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>54</b>

- (a) Caste identification through surnames is not foolproof, especially when different castes share some of the same surnames, as Bhumihars and Rajputs often do in this region. I may, therefore, easily have counted some Bhumihars as Rajputs.
- (b) Used here as an occupational rather than a caste category; includes several sub-castes.
- (c) Those identified specifically as Harijans (presumably Chamars). This excludes, for example, 1 Pasi jailed in connection with the Tarwa incident (who appears in the above Table under the category of 'Others').

community will be noticed most readily, and the prejudices if not the enmities of witnesses may play a large part in the identification. Even allowing for a large margin of error, however, the concentration of the upper-castes in the above figures is fairly striking. More interesting still is the difference between the Madhuban and Tarwa figures on the one hand, and those of Kajha on the other.

The Madhuban and Tarwa *kands* were probably the two most massive demonstrations in Azamgarh district in August 1942. They followed a build-up of several days and large parties came in from all directions to join in these demonstrations. Consequently a fairly wide spectrum of the rural castes and classes would appear to have been represented here, even if the 'leadership' remained in the hands of students and prominent men from the *zamindari* castes. The list of those killed in police firing at the Madhuban *thana* provides striking testimony to this, reading as it does like a mini-directory of castes living in the Bhojpuri region. Of the 15 men who died here, 2 were Brahmans, 2 Rajputs, 1 Ahir, 1 Koeri, 1 Kandu, 1 Bhar, 1 Majhi, 1 Lonia, 1 Gareriya, 1 Darzi (a Muslim), 1 Harijan, and 2 unidentified.<sup>69</sup>

The Kajha *kand* provides something of a contrast, probably because it was a rather more localized action on a somewhat lesser scale. Kajha was one of the few English *zamindari* estates remaining in Azamgarh. Confiscated from its Singhel Rajput owners—'notorious for their turbulence'<sup>70</sup>—and sold to an English indigo planter in the early nineteenth century, it had not readily accepted the new *zamindars*. In the 1940s, the owner of the property, an old spinster named Miss Sturmer, was an absentee, living in Calcutta, and the estate was run by her unpopular manager, Simon Finch. In 1940, men from Kajha had petitioned the district authorities against certain new demands made by the manager and his agents, and had organized themselves into a peasants' association to resist acts of oppression.

In April 1942, the Fatehpur Mandal Political Conference was held in Kajha with much fanfare and a large attendance. Swami Satyanand, one of the most respected Congress leaders of the district, presided, and several other district Congress leaders were present. Resolutions were passed against the oppressive acts of the manager, and a petition detailing these was sent to Miss Sturmer in Calcutta. But in the months that followed, a war of attrition continued between the estate authorities and the local people.<sup>71</sup>

This was the immediate context of the Kajha *kand*. When the Quit India revolt broke out, and news reached Kajha of happenings in Azamgarh town, in Maunath Bhanjan and other places, local Rajput leaders, assisted by some young men of the



area who were studying in Azamgarh, organized an attack on the manager's *kothi*. The extent of Rajput representation among those convicted for their part in this attack—31 out of a total of 54—is very striking indeed (see Table 1). Together with the Bhumihars and Brahmans, these *zamindari* elements account for nearly 75 per cent of those who were convicted in this case. Of the rest, some of the Kahars are likely to have been house servants. Koeris (market gardeners who were highly prized as tenants and usually cultivated the fertile lands on the outskirts of the village) are the only other caste who are substantially represented. In general, the middle and more especially the lower castes are noticeably absent.

The picture was similar in Sherpur village in Ghazipur district which was another centre of organized Congress activity and the starting point of another fairly 'controlled' attack—in this instance on the Mohammadabad *tahsil*. Those killed in the police firing at the *tahsil* on 18 August were all young men, between the ages of 18 and 30, from Sherpur: 7 of them were Bhumihars and one a Brahman. Of the other men from the Sherpur *mandal* who went to jail in 1942, according to a list drawn up by local Congressmen, 28 were Bhumihars, 3 Brahmans, 2 Ahirs, 1 Lohar, 1 Sonar and 1 other whose caste is unidentified.<sup>72</sup>

Except in some of the biggest actions involving the storming of *thanas* and the like, especially in the remoter areas, this leadership and heavy representation of upper caste men would seem to have been the general pattern. At the other end of the scale, the untouchables and others among the socially and economically most oppressed participated in significant numbers only when the signs indicated that the established authority had completely collapsed: as the official reports interpreted it, 'anyone who had the opportunity', including groups of Muslims, then joined in the loot.<sup>73</sup>

In Shahabad, the Triveni Sangh, established in 1933 to represent the interests of the Koeris, Kurmis and Ahirs, had declared its support to the British Government's war efforts and opposed the Congress in other ways.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, parties of men belonging to these caste clusters joined the revolt in many places—not only in the major demonstrations such as the attacks on the *thanas* of Tarwa and Madhuban (see Table 1), but also in more localized actions like that in Patkania (the 'Bardoli' of Ghazipur district) where as we have noted the Ahirs were among the leaders of the action, or in the village of Jamira (in Shahabad district itself) where the Ahirs had, according to a police report, 'taken part in sabotage and...were very truculent, refused to attend a meeting (called by officials) or to patrol.'<sup>75</sup> Not so the great body of

landless and menial labourers, a large proportion of whom belonged to the Chamar, Dusadh, Dom and other untouchable castes.

The point is illustrated very well indeed by the experience of Sherpur. When I visited the village in November 1983, I found local people proud to talk about the Mohammadabad *tahsil kand* of 1942 but evidently more agitated about a more recent *kand*—in June 1975. Sherpur is a huge *mauza* of some 15,000 *bighas*. The Bhumihars of the place owned all the land in the *mauza* and another 4000—5000 *bighas* in the neighbouring *mauzas* of Jalalpur and Govindpur, apart from other holdings somewhat further away which were not under their direct cultivation. The population of 20,000 lived chiefly in Sherpur Kalan (Great Sherpur), Sherpur Khurd (Little Sherpur) and a couple of smaller hamlets. There were Brahman, Ahir, Kandu, Dhobi, Dusadh and other families also living within these hamlets, and a separate hamlet of some 500 Chamar houses just outside Sherpur Kalan. On the night of 26/27 April 1975, two Bhumihars of the village were killed in what was described as a 'Naxalite' attack launched by Harijans of Narayanpur (on the border of Ballia and Ghazipur districts) and Sherpur. In retaliation, the Bhumihars of Sherpur captured several Harijans, smashed them to death with *lathis*, and set the entire Chamar hamlet on fire. It was this *kand* that the Bhumihars were all talking about in 1983. 'Sherpur' had played a valiant part in the 1942 movement, but now 'Sherpur' had to defend its honour against another threat: 'The Harijans were getting too big for their boots'.

A Bhumihar leader of the village told me, in terms reminiscent of Niblett's account of the 'defence' of Madhuban in 1942,<sup>76</sup> that their action against the Harijans had stopped the Naxalite menace from spreading westwards beyond Narayanpur. Another respected Bhumihar, an old 'freedom-fighter' of the place, said that some people from the Harijan *basti* had indeed become '4 anna' members of the Congress during the freedom struggle, and that the local Harijans had voted for the Congress party for some time after independence; yet there was never a Harijan Congress leader anywhere in the district. The fact was, he assured me, that the Harijans were illiterate and, therefore, could not think of the interests of the country: indeed, Harijans and Muslims had both always thought of their own 'selfish ends', irrespective of the nature of the movement.<sup>77</sup>

In 1983, the Chamars of Sherpur were not a part of the local community: they had minimal rights in the village, and in purely physical terms were placed outside its limits. Could they have been a part of the 'nation' four decades earlier?

## VII

Behind the revolt of August 1942 in northern India lay more than two decades of popular nationalist agitation and the militant struggles of workers and peasants and other more or less organized collectivities, spurred on by the intervention of nationalist (and, later, socialist) slogans and messages. To this were added the unprecedented political developments of the late 1930s and early 1940s—the resounding electoral victory of the Congress in a majority of the provinces and the formation of Congress ministries in 1937; the promise of legislation to improve the condition of workers and peasants, and the outbreak of renewed agitation on a larger scale among these classes; the political expectations, and fears, aroused by all this; plus the outbreak of a major international conflict in which (from all accounts) things were not going too well for the British, and (confirmation of this) the well publicized efforts of the British Government to reach some kind of constitutional settlement with the leaders of the Congress and other political parties in India. As 1942 progressed, the withdrawal of war-wounded from the Burma front across northern India; the return of migrants from Calcutta, Burma, Malaya and elsewhere, all bringing news of the British retreat under the Japanese onslaught and some carrying live evidence of this in the form of posters dropped by Japanese airplanes; and Congress propaganda urging cultivators not to take their crops to the market, all this heightened the anticipation of the impending collapse of British rule.<sup>78</sup>

All reports, from the autobiographical accounts of Congress leaders and ordinary freedom-fighters to the 'Transfer of Power' documents published by the India Office Library indicate the great increase in the number of political meetings that took place at every level in 1941-42, the flurry of activity for the recruitment of volunteers and much discussion of the kind of action that Mahatma Gandhi would prescribe as the 'final' step for the attainment of Swaraj. Axis broadcasts were popular and the progress of the War daily debated. 'Axis broadcasts are freely listened to everywhere,' the Bihar Intelligence department reported in early September 1942, 'and with their stories of bombardment of Assam, aeroplanes over Calcutta and national armies waiting on the Frontier under the leadership of Subhas Bose, have played an appreciable part in fomenting unrest and prolonging resistance.'<sup>79</sup>

In Sitamarhi, many were said to be convinced that the aircraft seen overflying the region were not British but those of Germany and

Japan ('their friends'), and that they carried Indian leaders engaged in reconnaissance at the instance of Subhash Chandra Bose.<sup>80</sup> In the Ghazipur villages, they sang :

*San chalis ka naya zamana, Hitler khel raha Holi,  
France khatam, England ki naiya dagmag-dagmag doli.*  
(The new dawn of 1940: Hitler is celebrating Holi,  
France is finished and England is on its last legs.)

and

*Hol-land khatam, Po-land khatam,  
Eng-land ki aayil bari na !*  
(With Holland gone, and Poland gone,  
It's now the turn of England !).<sup>81</sup>

In Calcutta, according to a secret report from the Inspector-General of Police, the populace was ready to welcome the Japanese with open arms, should they walk into the city.<sup>82</sup> The mood was widespread. Men as apolitical as Sir S. Radhakrishnan, Vice-Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University, were moved to say that 'there never was a period in the last hundred years when the feeling against Britain was so bitter as it is today.'<sup>83</sup>

In the circumstances, the many rumoured and even contradictory accounts, initially, of what the leaders had said regarding what the next movement would be, and later on, regarding what it actually was, reflected what one would have to call the 'spirit of the times'. It requires some stretching of the imagination to call the movement that followed a 'Congress' rebellion. Plainly, the uprising from August 1942 was quite different from anything that the Congress High Command could have anticipated when they raised the slogan. 'Quit India', and prescribed the *mantra*, 'do or die'.

The widespread uprooting of rail tracks and telegraph poles, destruction of bridges and culverts, and attacking and looting of *thanas* and other Government installations, have been described by one historian as actions approximating Gandhi's description of conditions in which 'violence' was 'almost nonviolent'.<sup>84</sup> Even if this were granted, there would be questions about the many instances in which popular fury went rather further—when the surviving members of the crew of a plane that crash-landed were killed by a crowd in Narayanpur, two Royal Air Force officers were dragged out of a train and killed at Fatwa, or the Sitamarhi officials were beaten to death in the incident

involving Ramphal Dhanuk; when the house of a European missionary in Champaran was thrice attacked and the missionary himself narrowly escaped being killed; an Anglo-Indian Sub-Divisional Officer at Aurangabad was 'tied to his office chair (with) files and furniture stacked around him; kerosene...poured over him and the whole lot set alight'<sup>85</sup>; when police officials and constables were burnt to death in Sadat (Ghazipur district), Minapur (Muzaffarpur district) and other places.

The spirit was indeed that of Bhagat Singh, as the Sherpur 'freedom-fighters' recall. And, as in the case of that great revolutionary terrorist, Gandhi may have praised the courage and the motivation that lay behind these actions but he was far from approving their method. This is what he said quite distinctly in a letter to the Government on 23 September. He had only then learnt something of 'the sad happenings in the country' from the newspapers allowed to him in jail. The Congress policy, he wrote, remained 'unequivocally non-violent'.

Had the government but awaited my contemplated letter to His Excellency the Viceroy and the result thereafter, no *calamity* would have overtaken the country. The reported *deplorable destruction* would have most certainly been avoided... The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people *wild with rage* to the point of losing self-control.<sup>86</sup>

Nehru wrote in similar vein of 'the frenzy of the mob' and of how 'the people forgot the lessons of non-violence which had been dinned into their ears for more than twenty years.'<sup>87</sup>

When Gandhi was released from jail in 1944, he stuck by his position that the lapse from non-violence was regrettable, and on 1 August 1944 called on all those who were still underground to surrender. Many did. But even at this stage when the movement had run aground in most parts of the country, many others, like the bulk of the activists who had established the *prati sarkar* in Satara, refused to surrender, declaring that Gandhi's *mantra* of 'do or die' took precedence over his later wishes.<sup>88</sup> Jai Prakash Narayan, one of the acknowledged leaders of the underground movement from the end of 1942, had said the same thing somewhat earlier. 'We have declared ourselves independent, and also named Britain as an aggressive power; we are therefore justified within the terms of the Bombay resolution itself to fight Britain with arms. If this does not accord with Gandhi's principles that is not my fault.'<sup>89</sup> Let it be noted that this statement came

after the massive and frequently violent rebellion that had occurred in his native Bihar, in UP and Bengal and many other parts of the country, and his own dramatic escape from Hazaribagh jail in November 1942. It was another reflection of the fact that out of the preceding decades of militant nationalist activity, different centres of political initiative had emerged in the national movement.

One other point should have emerged from the above discussion. While the hatred of the *firangi raj* (or alien regime) appears to have been very widely shared, the bulk of the lower, labouring and cultivating classes, apart from the entire community of Muslims, refrained from joining the students and other activists from the more privileged classes in the August actions in eastern UP and Bihar. The evidence regarding the very limited participation of the Muslims on the one hand, and the untouchables on the other, provides an important perspective on the boundaries of the 'nation' and the nature of the ascendancy that the Congress had established during the struggle for independence.

The recent experience of the Chamars of Sherpur is in line with that of their fellows elsewhere in the region, and the consequences of lower-class resistance have often been bloody. Bernard Cohn has written about one such group of Chamars, belonging to the village of Madhopur in Jaunpur district. The Quit India Movement and the nationalist agitations of 1946-47 had their repercussions in Madhopur and 'even touched the Chamars'. They made little difference, however, to the normal relations of power in the village and the efforts of the lower classes to subvert them.

In 1948, the lower castes' Tenant (Praja) Party, which the Chamars had joined *en bloc*, succeeded in overthrowing the Thakurs (Rajputs) in the *panchayat* elections. Two significant developments accompanied this result. First, the Thakurs who had been the traditional leaders of the village, seeing that the Tenant Party was likely to win, withdrew their candidates from the elections: indeed the majority of Thakurs refused even to vote. There followed, secondly, a Thakur policy of total obstruction once the lower castes had gained control of the *panchayat*.

Ordinances which the council passed... could not be made effective because of the opposition of the traditional leaders who were *Thakurs* and of persons of other high castes.

The *panchayat* was unable to collect even its own tax. The low castes, and especially the Chamars, notes Cohn, lacked the economic base for a long fight against the Thakurs, on whom they

were dependent for their livelihood. The Chamars gave up an effort to seek redress through court action because it proved too expensive. The Thakurs, on the other hand, successfully disrupted the lower caste party by bribing some of its leaders, instituting law suits against individual council members, and finally by murdering one of the leaders of the Tenant party.<sup>90</sup> Plainly, neither the straightforward call to the British to 'Quit India', nor legislation to establish a new *panchayati raj*, was enough by itself to bring about a change in the relations between the dominant and the dominated.

For believers in the Congress' exclusive claims to 'leadership' in the making of the Indian nation, we may add one word more. There is a difference— as any observer of recent Indian politics knows— between the winning of elections (or what might be called 'popularity') and providing leadership to a people. The experience of 1942, and much other evidence besides, speaks of Gandhi and the pre-independence Congress as symbols, not as 'leaders' in this sense. Those who joined them— and this excluded significant sections of the population, quite apart from an effete 'upper class'— did so on their own terms, often appropriating these 'symbols' to wage the battle against the colonial regime in a manner that was their own. It is another matter that Congress spokesmen have, since then, denied the reciprocal nature of this relationship and claimed all the credit for what happened in 1942 and at other junctures.

The question of 'leadership' raises a further point. Leadership of the nation in a country such as India necessitated a frontal assault on existing patterns of deference and debasement, social exclusiveness and the prominent place of religion in public life. It required a challenge not only to an antiquated land system but to a hierarchical culture which kept women and untouchables, lower castes and tribal peasants, indeed, anyone who laboured with his or her hands, in a permanently subordinate position. Such a challenge was conceived of by many nationalist leaders, but was mounted at the grassroots level only by someone like Gandhi— and then too in a severely limited fashion, mixed up with revivalistic elements and enduring support for the Hindu *dharma* and even the caste system. For the rest, the Congress took up this task only piecemeal and fitfully.

The Congress leadership did not succeed all that well even in establishing the bourgeois notion of history as the story of Progress—man's achievement of 'civilization' and 'development'. For the majority of men and women in India, history remained the march of fate, where the chances of changing seasons and the

demands of the exploiting classes were interrupted only by famines and epidemics and sundry other cataclysmic occurrences. Even the peasant's act of rebellion was attributed to a divine will.<sup>91</sup> At the phenomenal level, it was violence—or, rather, a sharply increased incidence of violence—that was seen as marking the breaks in the perennial struggle for existence.<sup>92</sup> Hence it is that not the quiet efforts at self-regeneration initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, but the military daring of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is widely recalled in northern India as the factor chiefly responsible for winning India her independence.

### Notes

1. History is generally discussed in terms of Great Events or *kands* in the Hindi-speaking belt. In recent usage this term has tended to mean an episode of dramatic intensity, often accompanied by violence. In the slightly longer term, historical breaks or divisions are frequently dated by 'calamities', natural or man-made. Cf. my 'Encounters and Calamities: The History of a North Indian Qasba in the Nineteenth Century', in R. Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies, Vol. III* (Delhi, 1984) for a discussion of what makes an 'event' in local, north Indian history.
2. Information Dept., Govt. of U.P., *Fighters for Freedom, Who's Who, Varanasi Division* (Allahabad, 1964), p.1.
3. Paul R. Greenough, 'Political Mobilization and the Underground Literature of the Quit India Movement, 1942—44', *Modern Asian Studies*, 17, 3 (July 1983).
4. There is a large and growing body of literature that challenges the monistic vision of modern Indian history and nationalism. Specifically on what has been called 'the historic failure of the nation to come to its own' and the autonomous nature of the struggles of broad masses of people throughout the period of the nationalist movement, see R. Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi, 1982); G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in U.P., 1926-34* (Delhi, 1978); D. Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat : Kheda District 1917-34* (Delhi, 1981); S. Henningham, *Peasant Movements in Colonial India : North Bihar 1917-42* (Canberra, 1982).
5. See R. H. Niblett, *The Congress Rebellion in Azamgarh* (Allahabad, 1957); M. Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India; The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East UP' in D. A. Low, (ed.), *Congress and the Raj* (London, 1977); Henningham *Peasant Movements*; and Chandan Mitra, 'Popular Uprising in 1942 : The Case of Ballia' later in this volume.
6. Niblett, the District Magistrate of Azamgarh in August 1942, remarked on the 'vindictive policy' adopted by the Government and the atrocities committed by its officers in eastern UP: 'It is the behaviour of people like Hardy and Johnston, which has so embittered the Indian mind against the Britisher'. (UP State Archives, Lucknow) History of the Freedom Movement, Bundle I, S.n.1, 'Papers Relating to the 1942 Disturbances in Azamgarh District', Niblett-Ross, 24 August 1942.
7. (Indian Office Library, London) Mss. Eur. F. 180/23, recollections of G.M. Ray; and Mss. Eur. F. 180/22, of J. W. Orr.



8. Rahul Sankrityayana, *Meri Jivan Yatra*, Vol. 2 (Allahabad, 1950), p. 594.
9. *Ibid*, 595-6.
10. *Indian Nation*, 22 April 1946, cited in J. P. Narayan, *Towards Struggle. Selected Manifestoes, Speeches and Writings* (Bombay, 1946), p. 210
11. *Ibid*, 213; P. N. Chopra, (ed.), *Quit India Movement : British Secret Report* (Faridabad, 1976), pp. 210-1.
12. For a view that is different from mine on this, see Hitesranjan Sanyal's contribution, ch. 2 above, and also his review of Chopra, (ed.), *Quit India Movement*, in *Indian Historical Review*, IV, 1 (July 1977).
13. J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Bombay, 1969), p. 475.
14. See, e.g., National Archives of India, New Delhi, Govt. of India, Home Poll. 3/80/42 and K.w. 3 of 3/80/42.
15. D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma : Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 6 (Bombay, 1953), p. 124
16. P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. II* (Bombay, 1947), p. 333; Chopra, (ed.), *Quit India Movement*, pp. 207-8; Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, Vol. 6, p. 135.
17. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter CWMG), Vol. 76 (Ahmedabad 1979), p. 295, cf. also p. 404.
18. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 473.
19. CWMG, Vol. 76, p. 213.
20. *Ibid*, pp. 377-81. See also the text of the 'Quit India' resolution. *Ibid*, Appendix X, p. 461.
21. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 487.
22. CWMG, Vol. 76, pp. 391, 395. It is noteworthy that the Government too anticipated that the movement would develop along these lines. On 13 August and even as late as 17 August, Linlithgow was still expecting a 'formal' inauguration of Civil Disobedience by the Congress; N. Mansergh, ed., *The Transfer of Power, Vol. II, 'Quit India'* (London, 1971), pp. 683, 734. See also India Office Library, London, LP & J/5/271, Hallet-Linlithgow, 18 August 1942.
23. CWMG, Vol. 76, pp. 366-7.
24. Govt. of India, Home-Poll. (I), 3/70/42, leaflets no. 2 & no. 6. See also Hardiman's paper, pp. 112, 116 above.
25. CWMG, Vol. 76, pp. 365-6; cf. A. C. Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement* (Delhi, 1975), p. 54. Earlier, in a draft resolution on Civil Disobedience prepared for the Congress Working Committee, Gandhi had advocated voluntary strikes and non-co-operation by Government employees, but these points were deleted in the toned down version of the resolution finally adopted by the Working Committee; CWMG, Vol. 76, pp. 284, 451-3. In early June 1942, two American journalists asked Gandhi whether the Congress was not helping the British by leaving the services and the railways alone. 'We are, indeed', Gandhi responded. 'That is our non-embarrassment policy'; Tendulkar, *Mahatma*. Vol. 6, p. 129.
26. CWMG, Vol. 76, p. 394. Following the Congress Working Committee's resolution of 14 July 1942 calling for a non-violent mass struggle should the British fail to concede the Congress demand, Frederick Puckle, Director-General of Information, Govt. of India, had issued a secret circular urging all provincial Governments to use the 3 intervening weeks before the All India Congress Committee meeting on 7-8 August to launch a concerted campaign and mobilize public opinion against the Congress resolution. For the text of the circular, see Sitaramayya, *Indian National Congress, Vol. II*, pp. 360-4.
27. CWMG, 76, pp. 391-2, 403. A different version of this last message is also given, *loc. cit.* I have quoted the above version as being the more aggressive of the two.

28. See Hardiman's paper, pp. 82-3 above.
29. Also known as Yusufpur-Mohammadabad in order to distinguish it from Mohammadabad-Gohna in the neighbouring district of Azamgarh.
30. Krisnanand Rai, *Ghazipur ka Sansmaran* (Kashi, 1948), p.120. The following account is based on this history, interviews conducted in Ghazipur district and court cases relating to the nationalist campaigns of 1941 and 1942.
31. *Ibid*, p.131.
32. Lala Lajpat Rai, who was popularly believed to have died as a result of wounds sustained in a *lathi*-charge during nationalist demonstrations against the Simon Commission in 1928.
33. The verse is quoted as recalled by Thakur Vikram Singh in an interview at Saidpur (Ghazipur), 3 Oct. 1983.
34. (Court of Sessions Judge, Ghazipur), Criminal Sessions Trial 62 (G) of 1943.
35. Rai, *Ghazipur Sansmaran*, p. 135.
36. The poetry is from *ibid*, p.136. But Samrathi, *chaukidar* of Sherpur, confirmed the use of boats at the time: 'There are two rivulets between Mohammadabad and Sherpur. The said rivulets were fordable and people also used to cross the rivulets in boats at the time of the occurrence'; Sessions Judge, Ghazipur, Sessions Trial 33 (G) of 1944.
37. Rai, *Ghazipur Sansmaran*, pp. 136-7.
38. Interviews in Patna, Bhojpur, Banaras and Ghazipur.
39. See Ghazipur Sessions Trial 33 (G) of 1944 and 63 (G) of 1943.
40. Ms. history of Sherpur, in Hindi (in possession of Pt. Jagdish Sharma, Sherpur), pp. 53-5.
41. *Ibid*, p. 50.
42. Ghazipur Sessions Trials 82G, 85G & 102G of 1943; 43G of 1944; and Ordinance Case 13 of 1942.
43. *Kirpa*, vulgar form of *kripa*, meaning 'if you please'.
44. Sankrityayana, *Jivan Yatra*, Vol. 2 p. 595.
45. Mansergh, (ed.), *Transfer of Power, II*, pp. 787-8.
46. Cf. 'Congress Bulletin no. 2, 10 Aug. 1942': 'Gandhiji is behind bars, but...has nominated every man and woman as his successor', in P.N. Chopra, (ed.), *Quit India Movement : British Secret Report* (Faridabad, 1976), p.321; see also Gail Omvedt's paper in this volume, p. 237.
47. Mss. Eur. F. 180/21, recollections of H. B. Martin, which quotes a long letter written by Martin at the time. This account of events in Sahasram is based on this document, and (Bihar State Archives, Patna) Freedom Movement Papers, s.n.29, 'Reports from Magistrates regarding 1942 Movement.'
48. Mss. Eur. F. 180/21, Martin's letter of September 1942.
49. *Ibid*, contemporary letter and later recollections.
50. Niblett, *Congress Rebellion*, p.7.
51. Mitra, 'Popular Uprising', p. 175 below.
52. Niblett, *Congress Rebellion*, p.13
53. Govt. of India, Home Poll. 3/80/42, K.w. 3, 'Confession' before Magistrate, Sitamarhi, 10.9.42. The following account is based on this file, and Govind Sahai, *42 Rebellion* (Delhi, 1947), 162-4.
54. (UP State Archives, Lucknow) History of the Freedom Movement, Bundle I, s.n.1, 'Papers Relating to 1942 Disturbances in Azamgarh District', and Niblett, *Congress Rebellion*, p.17.
55. Bihar Freedom Movement Papers, s.n.29, D. H. Crofton, D. O. Shahabad-Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bihar, 9 April 1943.
56. *Ibid*, Collector, Shahabad-Chief Secretary Bihar, D.O. 1844/C dated Arrah, 3 Oct. 1942, 'Report on the Labour Strike at Dalmianagar'. Compare the situation in Jamsheedpur where TISCO workers, led by the supervisory staff, went on strike and declared that 'they will not resume work until a National

- Government has been formed'; F. Hutchins, *India's Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973), p.225.
57. Mss. Eur. F. 180/21, Martin's letter of September 1942.
  58. Martin wrote regarding his own sense of isolation: 'I am now under a *Madraasi* (emphasis Martin's) whom I haven't yet seen but he sends me the most blood curdling letters urging me to exterminate the movement. In fact for the last month I have only seen one official superior, a DIG of Police, and have been tasting the fruits of Direct Rule, such as commandeering all the petrol for my own use and seizing 3 wagons of sugar destined for Calcutta', *loc cit.* Hugh Lane, an officer who served in Banaras and Ballia in 1942, to take only one other example, recalled that 'For some considerable time (after August 1942) my views on India, on the prospect of Indian independence and my relationship with Indians, particularly Hindus, became almost 'reactionary'. I was revolted by the atrocities reported in Bihar, and the atrocities I actually knew of that were perpetrated in some places in the Benares Division by mobs attacking police or stray Govt. servants. I was disgusted at the wanton destruction of property and above all I was fiercely angry at the obvious attempt to cut communications to the Army in the North East and thus make it easier for the Japanese to invade India...'; Mss. Eur. F. 180/76a.
  59. Mansergh, (ed.), *Transfer of Power, II*, p. 741; and Govt. of UP, 'Fortnightly Reports' of political developments in the province from June to August 1942.
  60. (India Office Library) L/P & J/5/271, D.O. no. F 1/9/42, dated Lucknow 19 Sept. 1942. This report mentions also that the land revenue had been collected 'in full' in Azamgarh & Banaras districts. But this is confusing, since the revenue *qists* normally fell due in June and then in November and January.
  61. Govt. of India, Home Poll.: (I) 3/92/42.
  62. Mansergh, (ed.) *Transfer of Power, II*, p.771.
  63. CWMG, 76, pp. 385-90.
  64. Mansergh, (ed.), *Transfer of Power, II*, pp. 762, 909; L/P & J/5/271, D.O. no. F 2/8/42, dated Lucknow 19 Aug. 1942; F. G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement* (Delhi, 1971), pp. 288-9.
  65. (UP State Archives) History of Freedom Movement, 'Who's who. Azamgarh District' prepared by R. H. Niblett (District Officer, 1.12.39 - 22.9.42), entry no.96; Phulbadan Singh, *Azamgarh ka Svadhinta Sangram: Rajnaitik Iihas. Bhag 2, 1942-47* (Azamgarh, 1976), p.845; UP Information Dept., *Svatantrata Sangram ke Sainik: Zila Azamgarh* (Lucknow, n.d.), 'Introduction'.
  66. *Ibid.*, and Pandey, 'Encounters and Calamities'.
  67. (Bihar State Archives) Freedom Movement Papers, S.n. 45, 'Report on Civil Disobedience Movement' by S.D.O., Begusarai (printed as an appendix to S. Henningham's paper in R. Guha, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II*, (Delhi, 1983).
  68. These are the names used by people in Azamgarh when talking of these events, as also in Phulbadan Singh, *Azamgarh Svadhinta Sangram, Bhag 2*. Niblett describes the same events as 'The Defence of Madhuban', 'the tragic story of Tarwa' and the 'attack on Kajha' respectively. Details of those convicted for their part in these are taken from Phulbadan Singh.
  69. *Svatantrata Sangram ke Sainik, Zila Azamgarh*
  70. D. L. Drake-Brockman, *Azamgarh. A Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1911), p. 112.
  71. Phulbadan Singh, *Azamgarh Svadhinta Sangram, Bhag 2*, pp. 716-21; *Svatantrata Sangram ke Sainik, Azamgarh*
  72. *Purvanchal Doot* (Ghazipur), 25.8.83; Rai, *Ghazipur Sansmaran*, pp. 239-40.
  73. Bihar Freedom Movement Papers, s.n. 45, 'Report on Civil Disobedience' by S.D.O. Begusarai, section 3. Henningham seems to accept this interpretation in his characterization of revolt by the rural poor as a 'revolt of desperation'; see his 'Quit India in Bihar and Eastern U.P.: The Dual Revolt' in Guha, (ed.),

- Subaltern Studies II*. We have nothing but official opinions to support this view. Against it stands the evidence of substantial lower-class participation in events like the Madhuban and Tarwa *kands*, Ramphal Dhanuk's statement of how he and others were drawn into the struggle, and Sankrtyayana's striking testimony to the absence of any self-interest in the actions of the people, educated and uneducated, in Patna.
74. Bihar Freedom Movement Papers, s.n. 4, Collector, Arrah-Secretary to the Governor, Arrah, 30 March 1940.
  75. Bihar Freedom Movement Papers, s.n. 26, marginal noting by official on 'Petition' from a number of Pasis and Ahirs of village Jamira, P.S. Arrah to District Magistrate, Shahabad (n.d.)
  76. cf. Niblett, *Congress Rebellion*, 28: 'The tide of rebellion advancing from Behar, had overwhelmed Ballia and a good part of Ghazipur. The district of Azamgarh lay next on its path. The defence of Madhuban had checked it from the direction of Ballia.'
  77. Interviews, Sherpur, 10 and 11 November 1983.
  78. Henningham, *Peasant Movements* p. 175 quotes the Bihar Government: 'The impending collapse of Government is freely talked about even by villagers.'
  79. Govt. of India, Home-Poll (I) 3/50/42.
  80. *Loc cit.*
  81. Interviews, Sherpur, 10-11 November 1983.
  82. *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Vol. I* (Washington, 1960), p. 658.
  83. Mansergh, *Transfer of Power, II*, p. 937. This is from a statement, signed by Radhakrishnan and others, issued on 10 September 1942. But Radhakrishnan makes a similar statement in a letter of 8 August 1942; *ibid*, p. 627.
  84. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, p. 333.
  85. *Ibid*, pp. 276-7; Govt. of India, Home Poll. Kw. 3 of 3/80/42 and Home-Poll. (I) Kw of 3/107/42; Mss. Eur. F. 180/22, recollections of J.W. Orr.
  86. *CWMG*, 76, pp. 414-5 (emphasis added).
  87. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 487 & 489.
  88. Gail Omvedt's paper in this volume, p. 251 below. Cf. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution*, pp. 332-5.
  89. J. P. Narayan's 'First Letter to All Fighters for Freedom' (December 1942).
  90. B. S. Cohn, 'The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste' in M. Marriott, ed., *Village India* (Phoenix edn. 1969), pp. 71-2.
  91. See R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983).
  92. For an illustration of this point, see my 'Encounters and Calamities.'



# POPULAR UPRISING IN 1942 : THE CASE OF BALLIA

CHANDAN MITRA

For a few days in the second half of August 1942, the British Raj was on the verge of a humiliating collapse in the mid-Gangetic plains of India—an area stretching from Banaras in the west to the borders of Bengal in the east. Strategically, this was an area of utmost importance to the British as the lines of communications to Bengal and the beleaguered Burma front, then reeling under the Japanese onslaught, passed through it. Visions of 1857 were easily conjured up in the circumstances of August 1942. Linlithgow jumped at the UP Governor Hallett's description of the situation as a 'rebellion' and thereafter this term was regularly employed in official parlance to describe the Quit India Movement.<sup>1</sup> The Government felt that it had no alternative but to quell this uprising by savage force. In doing so, however, it further undermined the already tottering legitimacy of the Raj.

Tables I and II help to indicate the scale of the uprising and of governmental repression in what was avowedly the most widely 'disturbed' area, the province of Bihar.

We get an idea of the intensity of feelings among the crowds, and also of the pattern of popular actions, from Niblett's well-known account of the revolt in Azamgarh district.<sup>2</sup> Other official reports indicate the astonishing success of the rising in the rural areas of eastern UP and Bihar. 'By the 16th of August', according to the District Magistrate of Monghyr (Monghyr),

except for the fact that the situation within the municipalities of Monghyr and Jamalpur had been under complete control from the 14th of August, the gravity of the general situation in the district had probably reached its climax. Railway, telegraphic stations, including in the sub-divisions, had been isolated and complete anarchy and chaos were reported to be reigning in the interior. No policeman or Court peon was

**Table I**

*Statistics of death, injury and damage to property  
in Bihar during the disturbances of 1942*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number/Amount</b>
Number of times police opened fire	83
Casualties (fatal)	134
Casualties (non-fatal)	309
Number of policemen killed by crowds	9
Number of policemen injured by crowds	165
Number of Police Stations damaged/destroyed	86
Number of persons arrested	14,478
Number of Government buildings damaged	145
Number of Government servants killed	15
Number of whipping sentences imposed	196

Source : IOR, L/P&J/8/630, Coll.117/C/27/QA, India Office Library, London.

**Table II**

*Collective fines imposed and realized after the  
1942 disturbances in some districts of Bihar*

<b>District</b>	<b>Amount Imposed (Rs.)</b>	<b>Amount Realized (Rs.)</b>
Patna	312,450	311,528
Gaya	264,587	179,369
Shahabad	30,750	23,358
Saran	159,800	151,433
Champanan	94,500	55,206
Muzaffarpur	368,878	345,744
Darbhanga	462,200	391,514
Bhagalpur	349,259	337,383
Monghyr	206,091	97,995
Purnea	86,500	84,518

Source : IOR, L/P&J/8/629, Coll. 117/C/27/Q III, India Office Library, London.

bold enough to go into the interior. Police officers coming in with alarming reports appeared in plain clothes, saying that if they had come in uniform, their uniforms would have been torn, they would have been molested and the letters snatched away. The sub-divisional officers were sending repeated requests for immediate assistance, saying that even Court

buildings and treasuries were threatened and the lives of Government servants were in danger.<sup>3</sup>

In north Bihar, virtually no police outpost was spared by the rebels. In Darbhanga, 19 out of the 25 thanas were attacked, in Muzaffarpur and Saran 19 out of 23 and 27 out of 29 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps for the first time since 1857, Europeans were humiliated and even murdered by crowds in Bihar. At Fatwa, near Patna, where a priest Bihari Mahant had organized a meeting at a local temple in which students and junior Congress activists decided to disrupt all communications and enforce a hartal<sup>5</sup>, two Royal Air Force (RAF) officers were dragged out of their train compartment and speared to death on the station platform. Thereafter, their naked bodies were taken through the town on a *tam-tam* and finally dumped into the Poonpoon river. This incident is interesting for the clues it provides about the organization of mass violence. The crowd, according to reports of the investigation that followed, largely comprised local Dusadhs, although it was initially led by students. Apparently, when an officer fired in the air following the stopping of the train by the agitators, the Dusadhs went on a rampage and the students lost all control.<sup>6</sup> But the brazen manner of the murder and the triumphant display of the dead bodies also suggests that the conviction of the collapse of British rule was total.

Similarly, the cold blooded murder of the crew of two RAF planes that crashed at Pasraha on 18 August and Ruihar on 30 August (both in Munger district) indicates not merely the intensity of the resentment against the British; they also suggest the widespread conviction that the Raj had ceased to exist. In both incidents, significantly, the leadership was entirely local and the crowd consisted mostly of Gopes, Mandals, Koeris and similar low or intermediate castes.<sup>7</sup> Both Pasraha and Ruihar were then completely isolated from the towns on account of floods, and it is unlikely that there was much urban instigation behind violence.

What were the forces that lay behind this massive uprising? Economic conditions prior to the Quit India Movement caused considerable disquiet in the countryside. Prices rose sharply during the war years and the index for wholesale prices (base : 1914 = 100) jumped from 108 for all commodities in 1939 to 307 in 1943. For cereals, the rise was even more dramatic: from 86 in 1939 to 396 in 1943.<sup>8</sup> With wages falling steadily behind the rise in prices, disaffection was bound to intensify.

These sharp price increases naturally affected the poorer elements in rural society—small tenants and agricultural labourers



in particular—most severely. The extent of the price rise and its importance as a factor in the disturbances has been examined in some detail by Max Harcourt,<sup>9</sup> but it is worth noting that the inflation really peaked in the early months of 1943 rather than in 1942. It is also significant that in absolute terms, the average price of rice in Bihar's principal markets and the average price of wheat in corresponding UP markets in 1941 were lower than in 1929.<sup>10</sup> While the statistics for the period need to be examined more carefully to come to definite conclusions about the impact of rising prices (the absence of official data for 1942 is a serious problem), there is a case for suggesting that inflation was perhaps a relatively minor contributor to the 1942 uprising in eastern UP and Bihar.

From all accounts, it appears that people were more concerned with the unavailability of foodgrains and other essential commodities than with their prices. Land revenue collections in UP fell well below normal because peasants were apprehensive about marketing their grain. Congress propaganda in the countryside, including Nehru's frequent exhortations to store food, contributed to the growing sense of uncertainty and insecurity.<sup>11</sup> Price controls, thoughtlessly imposed by the Government without a clear understanding of their implications, added to grain shortages and on several occasions district authorities were forced to relax these to attract grain to the markets.<sup>12</sup> Consequently grain arrivals in UP markets fluctuated violently, depending on the farmers' apprehensions about the likelihood of requisitions.

Probably even worse conditions prevailed in Bihar. The Governor, Stewart, wrote:

There is plenty of rice about, but it will not move to the market.... To safeguard themselves from requisitioning—as they (the merchants) think—they have adopted the device of hypothecating their stocks to the banks, and I am told in north Bihar, the banks are holding three times the normal figure for this time of the year.<sup>13</sup>

Stephen Henningham, too, has pointed out that the incidence of market looting, 'a phenomenon especially associated with scarcity', increased significantly during the early months of 1942.<sup>14</sup>

Although these are indicators of the growing feeling of insecurity in the countryside, it is difficult to establish a direct relationship between them and the 1942 disturbances. Their real importance lay not so much in themselves as in their contribution to the growing atmosphere of fear, and the feeling that British rule was tottering.

'Defeatism and rumours', as a fortnightly report from Bihar put it,<sup>15</sup> added substantially to the insecurity. In fact, there is little doubt about the role of rumours in creating an environment for a mass uprising. Some rumours emanated directly from Axis propaganda, particularly radio broadcasts from Tokyo and Berlin which were listened to with great avidity. Many of these broadcasts concentrated on the alleged Axis commitment to free India from the clutches of the British and focused on the activities, real or imaginary, of Subhas Chandra Bose. Their credibility was increased by incidents like that in Dehri-on-Sone, in western Bihar, where some Italian prisoners of war, while passing through the town by train, dropped pieces of paper on the railway station platform depicting a double 'V' sign on the names of Gandhi, Bose, Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>16</sup> Other rumours stressed the greater military might of the Japanese along with their alleged sympathy towards Indians. The latter was held up in strong contrast with the attitude and practice of discrimination by the British against the Indians, particularly during the evacuation from Burma.

The fall of Singapore and subsequently of Rangoon also had a profound effect on public morale. Within weeks of the fall of Singapore, 46,000 persons left Jamshedpur.<sup>17</sup> The bombing of Vishakhapatnam and Kokanada in early April 1942 brought the war closer still, and led to an exodus from Calcutta of people from eastern UP and Bihar who worked in that city in their thousands. Within UP, there was a discernible movement away from places in the east of the province to places in the west as the latter were considered safer from Japanese aerial attacks. In May and June 1942, it was reported, the population of Kanpur had increased by 50,000, while in the same period large numbers of people were said to have left Allahabad and Banaras.<sup>18</sup>

In the rumours of the period we have an interesting example of a rural society evolving its own beliefs to cope with a threatening reality—a political counterpart of the cultural artefacts anthropologists write about. In 1942, rumours and myths evolved in accordance with what the people believed was inevitable. That the apparently all-powerful British should be humiliated in battle after battle could be explained not merely in terms of their adversary's military prowess, but also the latter's superior moral position. It was this conviction which made Dukalooram Kurmi, a small-time Congress activist of Bilaspur, say at a village meeting:

It is heard that Herr Hitler is being asked as to why he kills small children. He replies, 'Because you caused bloodshed in Jalianwala Bagh'. Our Sarkar says that she is fighting for

freedom. Hitler says: 'Why do you not give freedom to India'.<sup>19</sup>

Together with the insecurity and moral indignation, there was another factor of crucial importance in the rapid spread of the Quit India mentality. This was the expansion of the Congress organization in the years preceding the uprising, and particularly during the Ministry years, 1937—39. The Congress had expanded its network significantly during the early '30s but it was the drive to enrol new members during 1937—39 that saw the establishment of Congress offices in almost every big village in UP and Bihar. Moreover, once the Congress became the party of government, it acquired both prestige and power and important men in rural society, merchants as well as many landowners, were keen to associate with it. It can also be argued that the conflict within the Congress organization, especially between the pro-Gandhi group and Kisan Sabha activists during the Ministry years was significantly responsible for the rapid increase in party membership. Rival groups tried to enrol more members in order to influence organizational elections. But the sustained membership drive and more general political activity during 1937 and 1939 added to general political consciousness. In a politically backward region like eastern UP and western Bihar which had never been in the forefront of earlier Gandhian agitations, the qualitative leap in consciousness can be said to have come during the late '30s.<sup>20</sup>

A closer look at one district in this region may help to illustrate these points. I have chosen for this purpose Ballia, the one district that was entirely surrendered to the 'rebels' for a few days in 1942. The people of Ballia are extremely proud of their nationalist past. Mangal Pande, the sepoy who started the Mutiny, belonged to this district. Babu Kunwar Singh, one of the strongest adversaries of the British in 1857, although he came from neighbouring Shahabad, frequently camped here in the course of his campaigns. Again and again in 1942, the stories of 1857 were invoked by the leaders of the crowds to stir the people into heroic actions.

Ballia is an overwhelmingly Hindu district. According to the 1931 census only 6.54 per cent of the population of Ballia was Muslim. Early nationalist ideas came to Ballia through the medium of the Arya Samaj. A local *zamindar* of some influence, Ganga Singh, was responsible for organizing the activities of the Samaj in Ballia. This is interesting particularly because it was Ganga Singh who also founded the local branch of the Congress in 1919.<sup>21</sup> Ganga Singh's lieutenant, Thakur Jagannath Singh, who remained one of the dominant personalities of the District

Congress Committee (DCC) even after independence, was also an Arya Samaji. As late as 1930, Chittu Pande, perhaps the most renowned Congress leader of Ballia of all time, and an important functionary of the DCC from the late 1920s, was prosecuted for showing lantern slides of cows being butchered for consumption by Europeans and Muslims.<sup>22</sup> Ram Lachchan Tiwari, for long associated with the revolutionary movement in eastern UP and organizer of the Congress Socialist Party in Ballia, began his career as an Arya Samaj activist through the Samaj's youth wing, the Arya Kumar Sabha.<sup>23</sup> The Arya Samaj connection may not be very important in itself, particularly as the Samaj never acquired a significantly large popular following in the district, but it may help us to understand the social conservatism of the Congress leadership in Ballia.

Ballia did not distinguish itself during the earlier periods of countrywide nationalist agitation in the 1920s and the 1930s. In 1931, the local police arrested all prominent leaders of the Ballia DCC on a transparently framed charge of conspiracy to indulge in violent activities. Although the prosecution case was contemptuously dismissed in Court, the police succeeded in keeping the leaders behind bars for most of the 'disturbed' period.<sup>24</sup> That the agitation was so successfully and easily contained possibly reflects the weakness of the Congress organization in eastern UP at that time.

In the 1930s, however, Banaras developed as a major centre for terrorist activities. Increasing numbers of students from relatively affluent families of Ballia and Ghazipur went to the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), came into contact with young men involved in these activities, and developed revolutionary terrorist associations of their own. In Ghazipur in particular, under the leadership of Jharkhande Rai, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA) managed to enlist considerable support.<sup>25</sup> Those who went to study at the BHU but did not become involved openly with underground organizations, nevertheless became radicalized in their political views since the University was a base for a large number of Marxist and other socialist sympathizers.<sup>26</sup> Even the Kashi Vidyapeeth in Banaras, established with a view to providing 'national' as opposed to English education, turned out a large number of politically radical students, mainly under the influence of its Principal, Acharya Narendra Dev.

It is significant, however, that few products of the BHU or the Vidyapeeth took active interest in the formation or activities of the Kisan Sabhas of the time. The radicalism of the young-nationalists of Banaras was more often channelized into dare-devil acts of train robbery. Kisan Sabhas were founded throughout the region in the

mid-1930s. Most of these were led by younger Congressmen, who called themselves Socialist.<sup>27</sup> However, the Kisan Sabhas in these districts never developed the strength that they did in the neighbouring districts of Bihar.

In Ballia, the Kisan Sabha could mobilize support only for agitations against 'foreign' *zamindars*. Led by Vishwanath Mardana, a Communist, it concentrated on attacking the *zamindaris* of the Maharaja of Kasimbazar, the Nawab of Jaunpur and the Maharaja of Dumraon, on the grounds that 'foreign' exploiters must be tackled first.<sup>28</sup> In adjoining Ghazipur, the Kisan Sabha was led by Ram Surat Singh, a Congressman, and by Pabbar Ram, a supporter of the HSRA. Singh was obviously uninterested in the Sabha's activities, while Pabbar Ram admits that he was more interested in committing train dacoities.<sup>29</sup> In effect, therefore, there was little organized effort to build up a strong Kisan movement in this region. This contrasts strongly not only with Bihar with which the region shared many things in common, but also with Gorakhpur in the north, where Congressmen like Shibban Lal Saxena were giving sleepless nights to the Pant Ministry.<sup>30</sup> Although some minor Kisan Sabha activity continued in Ballia in 1941 and 1942 under the leadership of Mardana, for all practical purposes the Kisan Sabha in eastern UP, never renowned for its militancy, remained dormant on the eve of Quit India.

One reason for the failure of the Kisan Sabha movement in this region may have been the extremely vigorous mobilization drive conducted by the official Congress. Primary membership of the Congress increased significantly in these districts during the period of the Congress Ministry, as Table III indicates.

The rise may not seem spectacular for Banaras and Ghazipur, but it should be borne in mind that far stricter enumeration methods were employed in 1939 and the latter figures probably indicate the actual membership, while the 1937 figures are very likely to have been highly inflated. The 1939 AICC returns for the districts also tally with those reported by the Government of India's Intelligence Bureau.<sup>31</sup>

Another force that emerged during this period needs to be taken into account. This was the Congress Qaumi Seva Dal, which quickly became a major recruiting and mobilizing force in the nationalist cause. The Qaumi Seva Dal was set up in 1938 with R. S. Pandit as its convenor, and Sampurnanand, K. D. Malaviya and Nand Kumar Vashisht as its members. It was then known as the Congress Qaumi Sena and probably owed its origins to Nehru's ideas about a national militia following his visit to Republican Spain that year.<sup>32</sup> In 1939, the Sena was remodelled into the Seva

Dal following objections from Gandhians that it imitated the police far too much in matters of uniform and discipline.

While in most districts of UP , the Qaumi Seva Dal became moribund like most other voluntary wings of the Congress, in Ballia this organization grew rapidly under the leadership of some young Socialists. Rajeshwar Tiwari and Vishwanath Chaube were given the responsibility of organizing the Qaumi Seva Dal in Ballia. Both were students of BHU, in their early twenties, belonged to reasonably affluent landed families, and both were members of the CSP. Rajeshwar Tiwari's recollections of Dal activities deserve a somewhat lengthy quotation:

The Qaumi Seva Dal had a very important role to play in the movement of 1942. The main reason for this was that the Dal was composed of absolutely young people, hardly 18 or 20 years old. They were absolutely new to politics and very often were not even formal members of the Congress. Another factor was the type of training that was given in the camps organized by the Dal. It was very intensive and provided a sense of discipline. Some of these camps lasted for about two months. Youths from neighbouring villages came and lived together. We ate by collecting food from the villagers. We had long discussions, mainly on politics. We had uniforms, which made us feel important. Often we carried out 'Route Marches' through the villages, which impressed the villagers very much.<sup>53</sup>

There seems to be little doubt that the Congress Qaumi Seva Dal became a major instrument of mass mobilization in Ballia. During the wilderness years of individual satyagraha, the

**TABLE III**

*Primary Membership of the Congress in Three Districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, 1937-39*

District	On 13 Nov. 1937	On 30 Sept. 1939
Banaras	13,648	14,182
Ballia	12,610	21,027
Ghazipur	6,304	7,748

(Source : AICC Papers, File No. 20(i) of 1937 and c-1 of 1940)

Seva Dal successfully recruited a new generation of activists to the nationalist cause. In 1940, Acharya Narendra Dev was made the Provincial Commander of the Congress Qaumi Seva Dal for UP. He used this office to influence the building up of an alternative trained cadre, wherever he could. Wherever youthful enthusiasts of the CSP could be motivated, the Seva Dal expanded and during the events of 1942, members of this organization provided a readymade source of leadership to the crowds. Ballia headed the membership tally of the Seva Dal in the UP districts with 5452 members in October 1939. The closest any other district of UP came to this tally was Jaunpur with 3,000.<sup>34</sup>

This background is necessary in order to understand the dynamics of the Quit India movement in Ballia. Without doubt, the movement here owed its origins to more than the 'turbulent Ahirs of the east', as the official history of the disturbances tried to suggest.<sup>35</sup> The collapse of the British administration in Ballia was not simply due to the non-posting of European officials in this region, as Maurice Hallett tended to believe.<sup>36</sup> It may indeed be useful to focus on the organization of particular incidents that occurred in the course of the disturbances in order to examine the precise mechanics of mass mobilization in Ballia.

Typical of the events that took place by the hundreds in the east UP-Bihar region during the second and third weeks of August 1942 was the attack on the railway station at Bilthara Road in the north-west of Ballia, bordering on Azamgarh. On 14 August 1942 the railway station was attacked and looted by a crowd of between four and five thousand persons. A larger crowd subsequently looted an army supply train that happened to be passing down the line. The supply train was carrying sugar for troops to the Assam front, but was relieved of its cargo by the crowds assembled at Bilthara road. The crowd was incited and led into these acts by Paras Nath Misra, the son of a local school teacher who was then studying at BHU.<sup>37</sup>

Paras Nath Misra left BHU with his friend Sita Ram Rai of Ghazipur on 12 August after taking part in processions in different parts of Banaras city for a few days. They travelled by train to Saidpur in Ghazipur as part of the plan agreed at a meeting in the BHU campus for students to return to their villages and spread rebellion.<sup>38</sup> From Saidpur, they started walking. On the way, they held impromptu meetings in several villages where people assembled to hear from them what was happening in Banaras and other cities. The duo from BHU told these meetings that Banaras was in flames; that the British Raj was collapsing everywhere; and that it was the duty of the people to loot and burn all symbols of

the Raj. 'We ended our meetings with slogans like '*Thana jalaa do!*' (Burn the police stations); '*Station phoonk do!*' (Set fire to railway stations); and '*Angrez bhaag gaya!*' (The English have fled) and so on.<sup>39</sup>

Paras Nath and Sita Ram parted company after a few meetings in order to return to their respective villages. Paras Nath Misra arrived in his home village in the afternoon of 13 August. His friends in the locality were enthused by stories of the happenings at Banaras and decided to organize something in the locality as well. They went to a neighbouring village where a local fair (*Dambar Baba ka mela*) was in progress. The *mela* was, in any case, agog with rumours of what had been happening in neighbouring Azamgarh. Paras Nath addressed a meeting at the *mela* in which he called upon the people to assemble at Bilthara Road on the following day so that the railway station could be attacked.<sup>40</sup>

By coincidence, another incident took place early on the morning of the 14th at Bilthara Road. A train, hijacked by the students of Allahabad University, flying Congress flags, arrived at the station. The students were on their way to Gorakhpur and had been stopping the train at every major station *en route* to deliver lectures on the collapse of the British Raj and to urge the people to greater action. The students on board this *Azad* train told the crowds assembled at Bilthara Road that the programme of the Congress was to paralyse the Government in every way and it was therefore the duty of the people to burn stations, post-offices and police outposts. This excited the crowds greatly and by the time Paras Nath Misra arrived at the railway station, the crowds had already begun destroying the station building.<sup>41</sup>

While the crowds were busy reducing the station to rubble, the army supply train arrived. Within minutes, the crowds broke open the wagons and started to loot the sugar. The loot continued throughout the day and as the news spread people from faraway villages, even from Azamgarh, arrived in bullock-carts to take away as much sugar as possible.<sup>42</sup> Before the crowds could be led to further acts of destruction, news came on the following day of an army column making its way from Mau in Azamgarh towards Ballia. On receipt of the news all principal participants in the incident at Bilthara Road, including Paras Nath, fled the locality.<sup>43</sup>

The Bilthara Road incident helps to throw some light on the nature of the leadership and the patterns of mass mobilization in the countryside during the 1942 movement. Paras Nath Misra had no local standing as a Congress leader. He was still very young—barely twenty-one years. His father was, however, a respected



figure in the locality. Although a schoolteacher by profession, he owned a fair amount of land in the village. He was also a member of the Congress, though not a prominent activist. Paras Nath Misra's standing emanated primarily from the fact that he was a University student and had returned from Banaras with first-hand news of developments in that city. His stories confirmed what the people had in any case been hearing in the neighbourhood.

The role of the students in the 1942 movement is indicated also by the story of the *Azad* train. The student hijackers not only brought more news of disturbances, but also enthused the people into action. There is no evidence whatsoever that the people of the locality had planned any actions prior to the arrival of Misra and the *Azad* train. The mobilization was quite impromptu as the hastily planned meeting at *Dambar Baba ka mela* tends to indicate.

Another incident, which reveals not only the patterns of mobilization but also the nature of relationship that sometimes existed at the lower levels between the Congress leaders and local authorities, took place at Bansdih in Ballia district. On 18 August 1942 a crowd, estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand, attacked and looted the police station at Bansdih and, after the officials there had surrendered, proceeded to loot the *tahsil* building adjacent to it.<sup>44</sup> Thereafter, the leader of the crowd Gajadhar Lohar, who was the President of the Bansdih Town Congress Committee, was installed as the *Swaraj Tahsildar* of Bansdih. He ordered the 'dismissal' of the *tahsil* staff and gave them 24 hours to leave Bansdih. An attempt was made to set up a parallel administration in the town, which, however, lasted only for a few days as the leaders of the rebellion fled the town on hearing of the arrival of troops in Ballia.<sup>45</sup>

During the subsequent trial of the *tahsil* staff, it became clear that the local authorities were fully aware of the plans of the Congress leaders. Concerned by reports of popular unrest in the neighbouring areas, Rajendra Prasad Singh, the officiating Tahsildar of Bansdih, called a meeting at his house on 16 August. Besides the Naib Tahsildar and the Police Station Officer, prominent Congressmen and the *raises* of the town were present at this meeting. The meeting decided that the authorities would refrain from the use of force in the event of an attack on Government buildings. This decision was conveyed to Gajadhar Lohar when he visited the Naib Tahsildar, Lal Bahadur Singh, the same evening. It was disclosed during the trial that Lal Bahadur Singh had been posted in Bansdih for some years, and wielded considerable influence locally. Apparently, he was also on

extremely friendly terms with the local Congressmen, who visited him quite frequently. In the absence of the Tahsildar, who was on leave, it was the Naib Tahsildar who was in effective control of running the administration.<sup>46</sup>

Gajadhar Lohar spent 17 August addressing several meetings in Bansdih town. At these meetings it was announced that the vestiges of the Raj, as symbolized by the *thana* and *tahsil* buildings, would be destroyed on the 18th. On the morning of the appointed date, the Tahsildar and Naib Tahsildar were reported to have visited the sub-Treasury and, allegedly, removed some of its contents. That morning, some Congress leaders also visited the *thana* and after some discussions with them the Station Officer asked his constables to take off their uniforms.<sup>47</sup>

The crowd first assembled outside the *thana* in the afternoon of the 18th, and after some parleys with its leaders, the Station Officer donned a Gandhi cap and personally hoisted the Congress flag atop the *thana* building. The crowd entered the *thana* and having looted its contents, set fire to all the records. The Station Officer in his Gandhi cap and with a tricolour in his hand, then marched at the head of a procession to the adjacent *tahsil* building. The Tahsildar was in two minds over whether to confront the crowd or not. But after some members of the crowd snatched away a gun from one of the armed guards, he decided against offering any resistance.<sup>48</sup> The mob now entered the *tahsil* and:

...destroyed every scrap of paper or record which it contained. The Tahsil had an exceptionally good record room...every single shelf (was) completely destroyed and their steel supports battered out of recognition. The treasury containing the money was broken into and approximately Rupees 15,000 taken away.<sup>49</sup>

The leaders of the mob then took the money to the verandah of a local lawyer, Ram Chandra Mokhtar. Here the money was distributed among them. In his evidence, Ram Chandra said that the distribution was carried out in his presence by Gajadhar Lohar. He added that the same evening, while he was in the house of Lal Bahadur Singh, the Naib Tahsildar, one Congressman arrived, and after expressing his thanks for Singh's 'support', departed, leaving behind a wad of notes.<sup>50</sup>

The Bansdih incident reveals that the entire action was carried out with the passive compliance, if not the active assistance, of the local administration. Bansdih was, however, somewhat of an exception in this regard. Threatened by similar attacks in other

areas, the local authorities, especially the police, usually decided to abandon post rather than stay to confront the crowds. The behaviour of the officials at Banskidih, especially that of the Naib Tahsildar, point to the existence of a degree of collaboration not overtly seen in many other places.

Nevertheless, this aspect of the political situation also needs to be examined in any study of the 1942 movement. There is considerable evidence to suggest a wavering of loyalties among the junior administrative staff of the Raj following the assumption of office by the Congress in the provinces in 1937. Many of them sympathized with the Congress to a considerable extent. Sometimes, even the senior officials were affected by this. In 1937, the young District Magistrate of Munger in Bihar ordered the police to salute the Congress flag everytime the Premier Sri Krishna Singh did so while the Premier was on tour of his district. The Indian ICS officer also flew a Congress flag on his car alongside the Union Jack while Singh was on tour.<sup>51</sup> In Ballia, the teenage son of the District Magistrate, J.C. Nigam, took part in the processions and other demonstrations organized by the Congress in the first few days of the Quit India Movement in Ballia town.<sup>52</sup> Whatever may have been the actual response of the local authorities to specific incidents involving the crowds during August 1942, almost all junior officials at least appeared to accept that the British did not have moral force on their side. This was commented upon by senior officials in Bihar, who noted that at least in the initial days, the response of clerks and junior levels of the police to official orders was half-hearted, to say the least.<sup>53</sup>

One more point needs to be noted in the context of the Banskidih incident. It is quite apparent from the incident that the Congress leadership exerted a great degree of control on the crowds that it led. It is indeed surprising that the crowds should have actually participated in the loot of the treasury and not demanded a share in the booty. It is not known how the parcelling out of the money only among the leaders was explained to the crowds. Probably it was claimed that the money would be needed to run the 'Swaraj' administration. Whatever may have been said, it is remarkable, nevertheless, that the crowds remained under control and instead of demanding that the money be handed over them, proceeded to loot the local seed store.

The Bilthara Road and the Banskidih incidents also reveal a degree of planning and co-ordination that was carried out by the local leaders. It is clear that the attacks on railway stations, police *thanas* and *tahsils* did not just happen. Most of these were planned a day or more in advance. In this sense, the idea of a 'spontaneous

revolution' in 1942 is somewhat misleading, although of course there was no long-term planning or organization of these events.

Local plans and actions of the kind discussed above culminated in the convergence of the crowds on Ballia town, which led to the surrender of the British administration of the district. The major part of the planning for this was done in Banskhi itself. It was decided on the afternoon of 18th August, after the local administration had crumbled, that the crowds would proceed to Ballia on the following day, to seek the release of the Congress leaders, many of whom had been imprisoned well before the crackdown of 9 August. News of the planned assembly at Ballia spread and on the 19th, huge crowds converged on Ballia from all directions, causing panic among the officials.

Ballia town had been relatively quiet for the first few days of the movement. Most prominent Congressmen were behind bars since late 1941 or early 1942. In fact, when the official crackdown began on 9 August, the only important Congressman free to be arrested was Radha Mohan Singh, a local member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).<sup>54</sup> Barring a few processions by students and one incident of police firing, the situation in the town was reported to be under control. The official history of the disturbances has noted:

Up to the 14th, the district had been relatively untroubled, but on the 15th the crowd in the city, largely inspired by students who had arrived from Benares by train on the previous day, temporarily got the upper hand and looted the railway station. Litigants (for the Courts were still open) returning to their villages, spread the rumour that Congress Raj had begun.<sup>55</sup>

From the pattern of disturbances, however, it is quite apparent that the final collapse of the Raj in the headquarters town would never have taken place without the collapse of the administration in the surrounding countryside. The town had been cut off from the outside world from 15 August. The situation was aggravated by the circulation of rumours that Lucknow had fallen and that the administration had generally collapsed all over Bihar.<sup>56</sup> Nigam, the District Magistrate, alarmed by such reports and the visible collapse of his authority in the countryside, initiated talks with the leaders of the DCC whom he had imprisoned. He visited Chittu Pande, the DCC President, on 17 August and offered to release him in order to combat what Nigam informed Pande was a 'non-Gandhian' movement.<sup>57</sup> Pande demanded that all political

prisoners must be released if the District Magistrate wanted the Congress to cooperate. Nigam, understandably, hesitated.

On 19 August huge crowds began to assemble outside Ballia jail chanting nationalist slogans and demanded the release of the Congress leaders. Nigam decided that it would be impossible to put up any effective resistance and having ordered the burning of Rupees 440,000 worth of currency notes in the district treasury, released all political prisoners.<sup>58</sup>

This marked the climax of the popular uprising in Ballia. Chittu Pande and the dominant Gandhian leadership of the Ballia Congress thereafter decided to throw in their support for the restoration of some kind of order. Replying to a tumultuous welcome by the crowds as he was released from jail, Pande asked the people to 'go home' as Swaraj had been achieved and the Congress did not have any further programme at that moment.<sup>59</sup> At a victory meeting convened in the Town Hall by the socialists against Pande's wish, Pande reiterated this point.<sup>60</sup> At that meeting, however, in what was later described as a 'light-hearted atmosphere', Chittu Pande was proclaimed Swaraj Ziladhi (Independent District Magistrate) of Ballia and some more 'Swaraj' appointments were announced.<sup>61</sup> For the next two days the Congress leaders remained huddled in the house of Shiv Prasad Gupta, a local merchant and Congress leader. For all practical purposes, they waited for the army to come and restore authority in the district. News that Ghazipur had been 'pacified' by the army and that it was marching towards Ballia came in on the 20th, and on the 21st morning all the Congress leaders fled Ballia town.<sup>62</sup> Ballia lay prostrate before the army and the army commanders found everything suspiciously quiet:

Marsh-Smith reports on return that villages within 2 to 3 miles of railways deserted. The towns where outrages had taken place also deserted. Leaders fled into the interior, possibly Bihar. Hunting down organizers made difficult by swollen rivers...When Marsh-Smith arrived, town (Ballia) deserted.<sup>63</sup>

This anti-climactic end of the 1942 Movement in the area of its greatest intensity probably reflects the limitations of mass mobilization as carried out by the nationalists. Years of virulent anti-British mobilization had created the necessary environment for mass action. When the time for action arrived the people were prepared to act under any leadership that could be provided. But the leadership was wanting.

In Ballia the socialists had developed a large network of activists who were able to channelize popular energy into direct mass action against the state. In fact most of the actions that took place in the district were led by radical Congressmen, who were in some way or the other associated with the Congress Socialist Party or the CSP-dominated Qaumi Seva Dal.<sup>64</sup> Yet, they too were unable to present a programme substantially different from that of the mainstream Congress. At the victory meeting in the Town Hall in Ballia, the young Socialists accused Chittu Pande and the rest of the Gandhian leadership of the DCC of treachery, and demanded that instead of sitting quietly the Congress should call for further actions. Pande refused. The Socialists then held a meeting of the rump that was left after the bulk of the crowd had left the hall with the leaders, and chalked out a course of action. This consisted of attacking the houses of some rich loyalists of the town. Accordingly, they looted the house of a Rai Bahadur, a Sub-divisional Magistrate and a Government doctor.<sup>65</sup> However that was the limit of their radical actions. Even they failed to proceed beyond these symbolic gestures.

The purpose of this detailed account of Quit India activities in Ballia is not to suggest that the pattern of revolt or the manner of mobilization was identical in other places. Clearly there was considerable local variation, not only between different parts of India but even within the region of eastern UP and Bihar. The caste and class configurations varied. The level of political organization differed. As I have already indicated, for instance, Kisan Sabha activists played a more important role in the Quit India Movement in Bihar than in Ballia or other districts of eastern UP, and this inspite of a major split between the supporters of Sahajanand Saraswati, who formally opposed the movement, and the followers of the CSP—who wholeheartedly supported it.

What was common to the districts of the mid-Gangetic plain was the rise of a popular movement on a scale not seen in India since the uprising of 1857. It was not a movement of any particular section of the society, but enjoyed the active support of all except the very biggest of the landlords. It was propelled by the belief of most of the participants, who were inevitably poor, that by overthrowing an alien rule they were laying the foundations of a new order. It reflected the success of decades of nationalist propaganda that only when the British were removed could the basis of a just society be laid. In effect, there was a strong ideological basis to the mass protest against British rule which developed in this region. It is important to understand this faith for it led hundreds of people into their particular acts of bravery and

heroism. It is also perhaps reflective of the difference of 1942 from other movements for Indian independence, that it was not a movement of the leaders, but took place almost in spite of them. Indeed the men and women who surfaced to lead this remarkable protest retreated into oblivion as suddenly as they had emerged from it, when their heroic attempt had failed. Quit India was a movement of the people, and like all peoples' movements it was dominated by a spirit. That 'spirit of 1942' is perhaps the most difficult part of the movement for the historian to recapture.

### Notes

1. Hallett to Linlithgow, 18 August 1942 in File R/3/1/78, India Office Library (IOL), London.
2. R. H. Niblett: *The Congress Rebellion in Azamgarh: August-September 1942, as recorded in the diary of R. H. Niblett*, edited by S. A. A. Rizvi (Allahabad, 1957), *passim*.
3. Report of the 1942 disturbances in Munger by the District Magistrate, Munger to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar in File No.47 Freedom Movement Collection (FMC), Bihar State Archives (BSA), Patna.
4. BSA, Patna, FMC, File No.49, Report of the DIG, Northern Range to IG Police, Bihar.
5. National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), File No.kw to 3/80/42, Home (Poll.).
6. NAI, Home (Poll.), File No.kw to 3/80/42, Judgements by special Courts on cases arising out of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1942 in Bihar.
7. See files nos. 3/22/42, kw to 3/107/42, Home (Poll.) NAI, and files IOR, L/P&J/8/628, Coll 117/C/27/Q II and Q III, (IOL).
8. A.K. Ghosh, *Prices and Economic Fluctuation in India, 1861-1947* (New Delhi, 1979) Table 5, p.48.
9. Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India : The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East U.P.', in D.A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj* (London, 1977).
10. The average price of wheat in 11 principal markets of U.P. was Rs. 4.26 per maund in 1941 compared to Rs. 5.53 in 1929, while the average price of rice in five principal markets of Bihar was Rs.5.90 per maund in 1941 compared to Rs.7.04 in 1929. These calculations are based on *Statistical Abstracts of British India, 1939-40, and 1936-37 to 1940-41*, Tables 111 and 164 respectively.
11. Fortnightly Report on the Political Situation in U.P. for the Second Half of February 1942; (hereafter, cited as FR, 2 Feb., 1942, U.P.; and similarly for Bihar).
12. FR, 2 May., 1942, U.P.
13. IOR, L/P&J/5/177, Stewart Linlithgow, 15 July., 1942, IOL.
14. S. Henningham, 'Quit India in Bihar and Eastern U.P. : The Dual Revolt', in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies, II* (Delhi, 1983).
15. FR, 1 April, 1942, Bihar.
16. FR, 1 March, 1942, Bihar.
17. FR, 1 Feb, 1942, Bihar.
18. FR, 1 July 1942, U.P., Appendix. 'The Population of cities like Allahabad and Banares, on the other hand, is declining as people are going to rural areas considered safer than cities', it added.

19. NAI File No.3/9/41, Home (Poll.), 'Collection of "Bad Bits" from speeches by Congressmen'.
20. See my 'Political Mobilization and the Nationalist Movement in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, 1937-1942', (unpublished Oxford D.Phil.thesis, 1983), pp.188ff, for an elaboration of this point.
21. Interview with Vishwanath Mardana, Ballia, 20 April 1982.
22. FR, 2 March 1930, U.P.
23. Interview with Ram Lachchhan Tiwari, Ballia, 22 April 1982.
24. Proceedings of the Ballia Conspiracy Case of 1931 in the Collectorate Record Room (Coll. RR), Ballia.
25. Interview with Pabbar Ram, founder-Secretary Ghazipur District Kisan Sabha and later Secretary Ghazipur CPI, and Raj Nath Singh, ex-member of HSRA and later Secretary of the Ghazipur District CPI(M); Ghazipur, 26 April 1982.
26. Interview with Sunil Dasgupta, a student of BHU at the time and later Secretary of Banaras District CPI, Banaras 14 April 1982.
27. In Ballia, the Kisan Sabha was led by Vishwanath Mardana, son of a wealthy Kayasth family of lawyers and a young Congressman, while in Ghazipur, the President of the Kisan Sabha was Ram Surat Singh, a young Congressman who belonged to a family of substantial landowners.
28. Interview with Vishwanath Mardana, 20 April 1982.
29. Interview with Pabbar Ram, 26 April 1982.
30. Shibban Lal Saxena, MLA, had caused considerable unrest in Gorakhpur and had refused to heed Pant's requests to cease his virulent anti-zamindar campaigns. Eventually, Nehru summoned him to Allahabad and ordered him to reduce his activities which had become a considerable embarrassment to the Pant Ministry.
31. Intelligence Branch, Government of India, Congress Membership figures in File: 4/7/41, Home (Poll.), NAI.
32. Note compiled by Jagdish Prasad on the U.P. Congress Qaumi Seva Dal in File No. G-2 of 1940, All-India Congress Committee (AICC) Papers; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, (NMML), New Delhi.
33. Interview with Rajeshwar Tiwari, Ballia, 19 April 1982.
34. UPPCC Circular No.5, October 1939, in File No. P-20 Kw. 1 of 1939, AICC Papers, NMML, New Delhi.
35. 'Congress Rebellion in the United Provinces: 1942'; A Secret publication by the U.P. Government in File No. R/3/1/359, IOL.
36. Hallett to Linlithgow, 24 August in File: R/3/1/78, IOL.
37. Proceedings of Case No. 10 of 1943; 1943 Basta, Record Room, Sessions Court, Ballia.
38. A meeting of the more radical students of BHU was held in the lawns of the campus on the morning of 10 August 1942. This was presided over by Dr. K.N. Gairola. Details of this meeting were narrated to me by Sita Ram Rai who was present at it, in an interview in Varanasi on 12 April 1982.
39. Interview with Sita Ram Rai, loc.cit. Corroborated by Paras Nath Misra, interview, Lucknow, 2 May 1982.
40. Interview with Paras Nath Misra.
41. Durga Prasad Gupta: *Ballia men San '42 ki Jankranti* (Ballia, 1973), p.33.
42. Interview with Paras Nath Misra.
43. Ibid.
44. Proceedings of the Bansdih Tahsil Case, Coll. RR., Ballia.
45. Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.47.
46. Proceedings of the Bansdih Tahsil Case.
47. Ibid.
48. Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.55.



49. Hallett to Linlithgow, 17 September 1942, File: R/3/1/78, IOL.
50. Proceedings of the Bansihi Tahsil Case.
51. Hallett (then Governor of Bihar) to Linlithgow, 25 October 1937, File: LP&J/5/169, IOL.
52. Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.27.
53. Report of SDM, Begusarai to DM, Munger; File No.47, FMC, BSA, Patna.
54. Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.17.
55. 'Congress Rebellion in the United Provinces', *op.cit.*, 5-6.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Interview with Vishwanath Chaube, then imprisoned in the Ballia jail, Lucknow, 2 May 1982. Also: Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.58.
58. Hallett to Linlithgow, 9 November 1942, File: R/3/1/78, IOL.
59. Interviews with Rajeshwar Tiwari and Vishwanath Chaube.
60. Speech by Chittu Pande cited in Durga Prasad Gupta *op.cit.*, p.71. Also pointed out by the defence in proceedings of Ordinance Case No.1, 1943; Record Room, Ghazipur Sessions Court.
61. Interview with Rajeshwar Tiwari; also Durga Prasad Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.73.
62. *Ibid.*, p.87.
63. Telegram No. G-268, dated 29 August 1942, Hallett to Linlithgow, File: R/3/1/78, IOL.
64. For other examples of CSP leadership, see my thesis, 'Political Mobilization and Nationalist Movement in Eastern U.P. and Bihar, 1937-42.'
65. Ordinance Case No. 1 of 1943, Record Room, Ghazipur Sessions Court, Ghazipur.

# STORM OVER MALKANGIRI : A NOTE ON LAXMAN NAIKO'S REVOLT, 1942\*

BISWAMOY PATI

## I

Malkangiri is the western-most subdivision of the present-day Koraput district of Orissa<sup>1</sup>, notable for its tribal population of Khonds, Bhumiya, Koyas, Parojas and Bondas, but of course containing many groups of non-tribals as well: Paikas, Malis and outcastes such as Dombs, Gondas, Ranas, Hadis and Panas. It lies immediately to the north of the Gudem-Rampa region, well known for its *fituri* tradition.<sup>2</sup> In August 1942, there was a major popular uprising in Malkangiri. In the following pages, I try to outline the nature of social and economic divisions in this area, and the contradictions between the people of Malkangiri, the Jeypore estate (of which it was a part) and the colonial administration, and then examine the forms of protests and mobilization which culminated in the uprising by Laxman Naiko.

## II

In 1802 the permanent settlement was introduced throughout Vishakhapatnam under Regulation XXV of 1802, and the Jeypore estate was conferred upon Ramachandra Deo with a *peshkush* (tribute) of Rs. 16,000. In 1872 Malkangiri, which had been leased out to Bangara Devi by the Maharaja of Jeypore for Rs. 3,500, was taken over by the Raja and came to be directly administered.<sup>3</sup> The *Peshkush* stood at Rs. 16,000 in 1941. Interestingly, the income of the estate was Rs. 12 lakhs, and forests yielded another Rs. 4 lakhs.<sup>4</sup>

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\*I am grateful to Mr. Laxmidhar Sahoo and the late Mr. Ramchandra Setpathy for help in conducting interviews, and to Dr. Sumit Sarkar for suggesting certain important modifications. However, I alone am responsible for the views expressed in this paper.

Malkangiri was under the *mustajari* system. The *mustajars* who were usually village headmen, enjoyed a number of hereditary rights. They were required to collect taxes from the tenants and make payments to the estate. They held *hetha-bhumi* (rent free tenures), and enjoyed some privileges regarding the use of the forests. On certain occasions, they entered into profitable contracts with the Public Works Department to supply labourers. Some of them also appear to have recruited *gotis* and *bethias*, different categories of bonded labour which are explained below. The *mustajars*' relationship with the estate was based on 'custom' and hence not very clearly defined.<sup>5</sup> Neither the taxes due from tenants nor the amount to be paid to the estate was fixed, so that there was room for manipulation and bargaining. The *mustajars* exploited their tenants and labourers, but they also had certain grievances in common with the cultivators below, especially when it came to meeting the increased tax demands of the estate. There was a degree of insecurity, for the *mustajars* could be dismissed by the estate.

Below the *mustajars* were the tillers, both settled agriculturists and shifting cultivators. The former had occupancy rights granted by the Madras Estates Land Act (1908), but in practice they could be dispossessed by the *mustajars*. Moreover, the *mustajars* sometimes resorted to illegal exactions from the tenants. The latter paid rents on the 'seed capacity' of the land, and in some areas they paid rents on the number of ploughs and hoes they owned. In both cases the rent was paid in grain. Some people engaged in *podu* (shifting cultivation) and escaped the taxation system because of the inaccessibility of the forests and the nature of cultivation. Thus, they would burn a portion of the forests and, fence the plot, till the soil and sow seeds, and return after a gap of some months to reap the harvest.<sup>6</sup> For those among the *podu* cultivators who did pay taxes, the number of ploughs and hoes they owned formed the basis of the assessment. In some parts of Malkangiri the tenants paid cash rents.<sup>7</sup>

In some cases the occupancy tenants as well as the holders of the *inam* lands sub-let a portion of their holdings on the 'sharing system'.<sup>8</sup> When this was done the occupancy rights appear to have remained with the persons who sub-let their land. The settled occupancy tillers paid taxes in grain to the *mustajars*.

The agricultural labourers formed a class of people who were paid in grain ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  *kunchums*, roughly  $3\frac{1}{2}$  kilogrammes, of paddy per day). The non-agricultural male labourers (coolies) worked for wages of 3 to 4 annas per day in the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> Malkangiri also had *goti* and *bethi* labourers. The former bound themselves for a sum

of money to serve for a period till the loan together with its interest was repaid. The latter were forced labourers.<sup>10</sup>

Relations between the Jeypore estate and the people of Malkangiri involved several oppressive features. These included the offering of *bethi*, *goti* and *gudem* services. According to official estimates there were three categories of *bethi*: *a* forced and unpaid labour; *b* forced and inadequately paid labour; *c* forced but 'adequately' paid labour. The first category included the forced labourers recruited by government officials (i.e. lower order officials and the police), estate officials and *mustajars*. The second category included recruits from particular villages, who were expected to perform domestic work for the government and estate staff. Around 1940, these people were paid at the rate of one anna per day. Finally, there were the forced recruits who carried *dak* and luggage of the officials of the estate and the government when they went out on tours. They were paid fixed amounts considered inadequate by the recruits themselves. The system of *bethi* was, in general, hated by people of Malkangiri. For example, the Koyas chose to settle down in the interior areas for fear of being recruited for *bethi*.<sup>11</sup>

While *bethi* represented labour-extraction unconnected with any credit-mechanism, the *goti* system was one of bonded labour in return for advances in money or grain. The *goti* system implied that on receiving some advance in money or grain the person engaged himself by a written agreement to be a labourer for his creditor for agricultural and domestic purposes as long as the loan together with the interest remained unpaid. It needs to be emphasized that some 'hillmen' too, in all probability *mustajars*, recruited *gotis*. The system degenerated into serfdom since the *sowcars* took advantage of the illiteracy of the people to manipulate calculations. This contributed significantly to the problem of landlessness and migration.<sup>12</sup>

*Gudem* was the forced supply of provision and thatching material to the estate and its officials, government officials as well as contractors of the Public Works Department on payment of a fraction of the actual price. Malkangiri was notorious for this illegal practice, which caused great hardships to the people.<sup>13</sup>

The system of taxation in the estate was arbitrary in several respects. Our evidence indicates that in Malkangiri the land tax was collected in three ways. Normally, the *raiya*t paid as rent a quantity of grain equal to the amount required to sow the land. However, in some inaccessible parts the rent was fixed on the number of ploughs and hoes owned. We also have evidence of cash rents being collected. The system had certain implications

which acted adversely against the people. When the grain was taken to the estate granary to pay the rent, tolls had to be paid for using the main roads. Assessment on the basis of the number of ploughs and hoes meant heavy pressure since there was no uniform system of assessment, and because this did not take into account the quality of the land cultivated nor the quantity of the harvest reaped. Moreover, even if the land was left fallow, the tax had to be paid. The payment of cash rents was linked to the evolution of a market and a money economy, as well as the emergence of moneylenders. Finally, it must be mentioned that the non-tribal peasants had to pay more than the tribal peasants.<sup>14</sup>

We now turn to the erosion of traditional rights during the colonial period. These are illustrated well in the case of the forests. In the Jeypore estate the forests were traditionally owned by the Maharaja. After 1900 the penetration of the profit motive altered the situation, and, unlike in parts of coastal Orissa, this process was relatively rapid. On the one hand, the forests were demarcated and leased out for profit by the estate. By 1907 an area of 327 square miles had been reserved in the estate, and this had risen to 1,645.14 square miles by 1939.<sup>15</sup> In Malkangiri timber leases were granted in 1917 for railway sleepers to H. Dear and Company which were renewed in 1922 for twenty years, and to Motu Industries in 1937 for ten years for teak, *bija*, *hallandu* and *sisoo*.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, a battle against *podu* was unleashed. In Malkangiri *podu* was preferred to settled agriculture because the region was hilly and forested, and because *podu* was economical for the poorest cultivators.

The eagerness to make profits out of the forests also led to the enforcement of a forest cess as a regular tax and an arbitrary system of fining people for 'stealing' wood. Anyone accused of stealing wood was forced to pay a rupee and a hen as fine. In an area like Malkangiri, where money was scarce, the cash fine was unbearable.<sup>17</sup> Further, the rights over the trees which stood on the holdings of tenants were also lost—they were forced to make payments when they cut down trees of the reserved species, and they could not enjoy the fruits either. The estate officials forced them to part with tree products like lac which was refined at Jeypore, but paid nothing in return.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, restrictions were imposed on the use of tanks.<sup>19</sup> The taxes on opium and the excise duties were also disliked. All these features created a sense of deprivation since it came to be increasingly felt that customary rights were being lost.<sup>20</sup>

The growth of a market and a money economy produced certain far-reaching consequences in this tract. Let us begin by examining the uneven price situation within the Jeypore estate.

**Table I**  
*Prices of Rice and Salt in 1940<sup>21</sup>*

Place	Price of rice (per rupee)	Price of salt (per maund)
Gunpur	11-12½ seers	Rs. 2.5.0 to Rs. 2.6.0
Jeypore	14-16 seers	Rs. 3.0.0
Malkangiri	26 seers	Rs. 5.0.0

The low price of rice which was a local produce, and the high price of salt which was imported into Malkangiri, indicates the heavy burden that had to be borne at this time by the local people. Fluctuations in prices, the collection of the land tax in cash and the dependence on the market for certain essential commodities like salt and kerosene (which were not produced in this district) led to increasing dependence on moneylenders (Oriya *sundhis* and Telugu *kumutiš*) who were mostly from the plains. On some occasions standing crops were pledged to the moneylenders in advance.<sup>22</sup>

These problems were compounded by the considerable increase in population after 1921, which is indicated by the following figures:

Years	Percentage increase <sup>23</sup> in population
1921-1931	+ 41%
1931-1941	+ 17%

The increase in population meant a rise in the pressure on the land, given the absence of any alternative employment opportunities. In this situation an increasing number of holdings was sold off for non-payment of rents and debts. Although we do not have the exact data for Malkangiri, the following table,<sup>24</sup> which shows the amount of land sold for arrears of rent in the Koraput district between 1936 and 1941, illustrates the problem.

Table II

Year	Number of cases in which land-holdings were sold	Amount of arrears for which this was done			Amount realised		
		Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.
1936-37	54	7,637.	5.	11	6,972.	9.	0
1937-38	33	7,950.	2.	10	3,938.	4.	0
1938-39	25	5,593.	15.	1	5,175.	0.	0
1939-40	47	6,171.	0.	0	6,785.	0.	0
1940-41	25	2,822.	0.	0	3,297.	0.	0
1941-42	77	8,778.	0.	0	8,426.	0.	0

The growth of migration also reflected the development of a very difficult situation. Around 1940 two to three hundred people migrated from Malkangiri annually.<sup>25</sup>

It will help to situate Laxman Naiko of Tentuligumma in this context. A Bhumiya, Laxman inherited the post of a *mustajar* from his father. Oral evidence suggests that Laxman worked on a 'joint land' of about sixty to seventy acres along with his kinsmen, variously estimated to number between twenty-five and ninety. All of them depended on this land for their existence. Whenever a couple were to have a child they were given fifteen *putties* (approximately nine bags) of rice and were asked to leave, till they could return to work again.<sup>26</sup> Following local custom, Laxman, as the *naiko* (i.e. *mustajar*), was in charge of paying the taxes to the estate.

Although he was a *mustajar*, it is not possible to dismiss Laxman as a landlord, or even a rich peasant. Till he came to get actively involved in politics he worked on this 'joint land' like his relatives. The link between him and his relatives can in no way be equated to an affluent *mustajar* exploiting the village folk, extracting surplus and surrendering a major portion of it to the estate. It is possible that in Laxman's case exploitative practices may have been mitigated by kinship ties. I was not able to gather any information regarding his recruiting *goti* or *bethi*.

Even as late as the 1940s the relationship between the *mustajars* and the tribal peasants appear to have been a close one, although some of the *mustajars* resorted to practices such as *bethi* and *goti*. Kinship links probably reinforced this closeness in many cases. The experience of the *mustajars* from the plains tends to support this view. In such cases the clash of interests between *mustajars*

and peasants was often felt sharply, unrelieved as it was by kinship ties. We may refer here to the case of Kesab Patro, a *mustajar* of Badhigar, who was opposed in the course of the 1942 revolt.<sup>27</sup>

### III

Malkangiri has a rich legacy of popular movements, although it is largely neglected in historical research. Around 1879-80 the powerful Koya revolt in the Rampa area of East Godavari had swept this tract. In 1880 Tomma Dora, a Koya rebel, captured a police station (at Motu) after a fight and defeated a colonel along with his contingent who came from Hyderabad to protect Motu. Thereafter, Tomma Dora was hailed as the Raja of southern Malkangiri. However, the movement collapsed after he was attacked and shot down by the police in July 1880.<sup>28</sup>

Alluri Sitarama Raju's rebellion in the Rampa area also evoked considerable response from this region. In this phase (1922-24) the Congress had not struck any roots in Malkangiri. Nevertheless, among those who had been actively stirred were the Koyas. Issues such as *bethi* and the oppressive forest rules contributed significantly in securing support for Raju in Malkangiri. There are references to Raju's presence at Malkangiri. The contribution of the Maharaja of Jeypore in helping to crush the rebellion 'in the matter of transport and supplies and his generosity in making most liberal donation to the men engaged in the operations'<sup>29</sup> also suggests that the repercussions in this area were not inconsiderable.

It seems that Laxman was directly influenced by this uprising, twenty years before his own rebellion in 1942. It was in this phase that he came into contact with Ramachandra Kutia, a Koya youth, who had joined the *fituri*, and learnt to use a gun. He had the opportunity of going around the area and understanding the problems which affected the people. His subsequent interest in astrology and medicine (known locally as *desari* traits) indicate his contact with Sitarama Raju's rebellion and his belief that this could help him to strike roots among the people of the Malkangiri tract, in the manner of Sitarama Raju.<sup>30</sup>

There is a gap in our information between this phase and 1938 when we hear again about Laxman Naiko. In between the Jeypore estate witnessed a turmoil during the Civil Disobedience movement, although the Congress had not established a secure foothold here.<sup>31</sup> After Koraput district merged with Orissa on 1 April 1936, the Provincial Congress Committee (PCC) made serious efforts to establish itself in the district. Through the hard work and



dedication of Radhakrushna Biswasroi, Radhamohan Sahu and Sadasiv Tripathy (who had a certain amount of popularity in the area owing to their political activities) the PCC extended its influence among the people. The Congress came to be looked upon as an instrument to redress existing problems. In the elections of 1937 all the three PCC candidates (Biswasroi, Sahu and Tripathy) won, Sahu from the Jeypore-Malkangiri constituency. The electorate<sup>32</sup> voted against the two candidates of the *zamindari*, Bidyadhar Singh Deo and Balakrushna Patra, and also preferred the Congress candidate to Hari Har Mishra, an activist of the Utkala Sammilani. Bidyadhar Singh Deo was the nephew of the Maharaja while Balakrushna Patra was the lawyer of the *zamindari*.<sup>33</sup>

The Congress Revenue Minister's assurance in the Orissa Legislative Assembly on 12 September 1937, that all illegal levies in the Jeypore estate would be stopped,<sup>34</sup> was one part of the PCC's response to popular grievances after the Congress had won the elections. Placed in an advantageous position after the elections, the Congress wasted no time in attempting to consolidate its position in the area. Congress propaganda spread like wild fire in the *zamindari* and vigorous efforts were made to recruit members.<sup>35</sup> The new Congress recruits were sought to be remoulded in line with Gandhian prescriptions. For achieving this purpose a training camp was opened in November 1938 at Nuaput (about five miles from Jeypore). This was attended by some three hundred or four hundred people and it lasted for three months. During this period the new recruits were trained in spinning, scouting and village service. They were also given lessons on farming, animal husbandry and prohibition of liquor. These men were to serve as the link between the provincial Congress and the people of Koraput. Among them was Laxman Naiko.<sup>36</sup>

The inhabitants of Koraput welcomed the Congress victory by 'taking forcible possession of land' under the leadership of 'new Congress recruits'. This caused a number of 'petty' riots and in 'one instance the Congress flag was planted on such land and the local Sub-Inspector, who arrested the accused persons, was attacked with an axe'.<sup>37</sup> Efforts were made to replace *gandas* (village *chowkidars* appointed by the villagers) by Congress members.<sup>38</sup> Besides there was a sudden spurt in the area of *podu* cultivation as Table III indicates. This was a rough indicator of the renewed enthusiasm to re-assert lost rights.

The violation of the forest laws was not confined only to Malkangiri or the Jeypore estate, but also affected the Kondagaon *tehsil* of the adjoining Bastar state. In the early part of June 1938

**Table III**  
*Podu Cultivation (in the Jeypore Estate)*<sup>39</sup>

Year	Acreage
1934-35	3,294.20
1935-36	3,552.40
1936-37	3,706.95
1937-38	4,638.80
1938-39	3,510.21

several thousand *harra* trees were cut down by the Bastar villagers 'in imitation of the tenants of the Jeypore estate'.<sup>40</sup> One also comes across funds being collected in various parts of the Jeypore *zamindari* to set up Congress *ashrams*. In many cases timber was taken illegally for this purpose. Rumours circulated that the district police would be prosecuted and the Magistrate removed by the Chief Minister of Orissa,<sup>41</sup> presumably because they tried to prevent such activities.

The recruitment drive of the PCC continued successfully, and was closely associated with a variety of other rumours. In the early part of July 1938 rumours spread in some parts of the estate 'that Mr. Gandhi will visit the area soon and those who do not produce Congress tickets will suffer from ailments'.<sup>42</sup> Enthusiasm was also generated by PCC promises that under *swaraj* 'there would be no rents and taxes and no forest laws'. This trend also led to the virtual deification of Gandhi in some places 'and temple ritual took place at the Congress office'.<sup>43</sup> The increase in the primary membership of the Congress was indeed striking. In October 1938 it stood at 50,048 (Koraput district came second only to Cuttack district which had a membership of 58,878).<sup>44</sup> In fact, I was told that the Koraput District Congress Committee could purchase (and maintain) a car, a typewriter, an almirah and set up a library out of the four-anna collections.<sup>45</sup>

It was at this point that the real character of the PCC surfaced. In November 1938 a rousing welcome was given to PCC leaders like Godavaris Mishra, Dibakar Pattnaik (members of the Orissa Legislative Assembly) and Gopabandhu Choudhury. Among those who received them was Bidyadhar Singh Deo, the nephew of the Maharaja of Jeypore. The *Jubaka Sangha* was established under Bidyadhar's leadership, although the President and Secretary of the *Sangha* were Congress members. He was also to become

the President of the *Harijan* movement.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Bidyadhar Singh Deo began indulging in intellectual pursuits and studied *goti* and *bethi*, on which he wrote two papers. He wrote with appreciation of the 'liberal attitude' of the estate vis-a-vis *gotis*, but felt that this system of forced labour should be 'discontinued' as far as practicable'.<sup>47</sup>

While visiting the estate in June 1939, 'ostensibly with the object of enquiring into the allegations made against the officials and the Jeypore estate', the Chief Minister of Orissa, Biswanath Das, made it 'quite clear that the law must be obeyed and if any change was necessary in the existing law it was for the Ministers to affect the change and *not for the people*'. (Emphasis added).<sup>48</sup> The sharp decline in the area of *podu* cultivation in 1938-39, after the spurt of 1937-38 (see table), may also be an indicator of the restoration of the estate's authority, now under Congress aegis.

In Malkangiri we find that Laxman was appointed the President of the Congress Primary Committee of Mathili, which was formed by Radhamohan Sahu. This had a considerable effect on Malkangiri. By 1941-42 Tentuligumma alone 'boasted of a paying membership of two hundred members.' The *charkha* penetrated the remotest areas of Malkangiri, and along with the *ashram* schools established at various places like Udoyogiri, Pandra Guda and Tentuligumma, served to strengthen the position of the PCC. Many *adivasi* supporters in this tract, like Laxman himself, gave up hunting and eating meat.<sup>49</sup>

The *desari* traits of Laxman might have helped him initially, but in the 1938-42 phase his popularity was based on his leadership of local struggles. In 1939 he was arrested for launching a no-rent campaign at Mathili. In 1940-41, along with seven local villagers, he undertook individual *satyagraha* twice—once near the Ramgiri Outpost limits (in the adjoining Jeypore sub-division) and once in the Mathili police station jurisdiction. For this he was sentenced to two terms of six months' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.300/-.<sup>50</sup> It was through these *satyagrahas* and struggles that a pressure from below developed against *bethi*, *goti*, illegal exactions, 'shandy' (or excise) dues, plough tax, the stringent forest laws and the War collections.<sup>51</sup> When Krushna Chandra Bisoi (a student of class six) walked from Jeypore to Tentuligumma around 1939 he came across several villages (in the five days he walked) where he heard about Laxman's activities—his meetings, discussions and slogans against *panu* (taxes), *bethi*, *goti*, *gudem*, etc. Laxman used to move extensively in this 'forest country', usually covering thirty to forty miles a day. To the people he was the 'Gandhi of Malkangiri', and as long as he was alive they

used to follow him in crowds wherever he went.<sup>52</sup> When Laxman went out on these tours he used to tell his wife Manguli that he was going out to get *raija* (*swaraj*).<sup>53</sup>

The activities described above caused considerable anxiety to the Maharaja, the estate authorities and the colonial administration. They struck back with repression through the police and the *amins*. They also tried hard to mobilize moneylenders, some village headmen and other 'opportunists' against Laxman<sup>54</sup> in order to counter the militancy that had developed.

Laxman Naiko attended an important meeting of the Congress *karmees* at Jeypore on 13 July 1942 at which it was decided to send Biswasroi to attend the All India Congress Committee session at Bombay.<sup>55</sup> The Congress organization in the Koraput district was declared illegal on 9 August 1942.<sup>56</sup> Laxman, along with Balaram Pujari and others, immediately mobilized about two hundred men. They were 'armed' with saplings, cudgels and *lathis*, and carrying Congress flags they moved through the dense forests campaigning for *swaraj*.<sup>57</sup>

On 16 August 1942 some Congressmen threatened to loot the opium shop at Badhigar unless Sadasiva Choudhury, the vendor, surrendered his stock of opium immediately.<sup>58</sup> The crowd, composed of tribals and non-tribals (agricultural castes) from the Mathili and Padwa police station area, 'armed' with *lathis* and Congress flags, entered Sadasiva Choudhury's compound. In a fit of panic the latter surrendered ten *tolas* of opium, his scales and weights. After this, the leaders 'distributed the...opium amongst their following. The purpose of this demonstration...was to protest against Government obtaining revenue from this popular means of relaxation'.

After their success the people went on to express their displeasure with the *mustajar*, Kesab Patro, whose ryots most of them were. This *mustajar* had 'for long been unpopular for his alleged *zabardast* (strong arm) ways with many from whom *cist* (revenue)...(was) due through him to the estate'. Kesab Patro had gone away to attend to his property matters at neighbouring Govindapally. The crowd felt disappointed on discovering this. It proceeded to Khogan, about three miles away from Badhigar. The liquor shop owner, Padam Bisoi, was forced to close his shop, and his signboard was removed and thrown away.<sup>59</sup> The crowd then proceeded with great enthusiasm to the *hat* at Badhigar, 'trampling down the wares and produce for sale and knocking over people in their mad rush'—actions which the official version labels as 'rioting'. The attack on the Badhigar *hat*, however, reflects a widespread feature of the revolt. The *hats* were the points where

people were exposed to a variety of outside influences ranging from market forces to rumours. They served as important centres of discussion and were used for meetings to decide on future action and to mobilize support.<sup>60</sup>

On 23 August 1942 another interesting event occurred in Nuagaon, in the Mathili police station area. A 'Congress crowd' of about two hundred, threatened to burn the house of Gangadhar Guru (who owned a food store) of Nuagaon, unless he provided them with food. According to a petition submitted subsequently by Guru, after satisfying their hunger 'the intruders took also ... (his) valuables (i.e. clothes and Rs. 200/- in cash) lying invitingly there'. However, according to the police investigation report, Guru's allegations regarding theft were false.

There appears to be some difference in the response of the crowd which distributed opium at Badhigar, and the crowd led by Laxman Naiko which attacked liquor shops at Kongrabeda, where liquor was destroyed and not distributed. After this at around noon on 17 August 1942, Laxman led his 'band of rowdies' to Kuntipalli and 'attacked' the liquor shop there. The crowd (composed of tribals and non-tribals, like *gaudas*) reached the place shouting slogans, brandishing *lathis* and Congress flags. The pots containing the fermented *mohwa* and the distillation apparatus was destroyed.

Laxman led another successful attack on the Sindhabeda liquor shop on 18 August 1942. After this he deputed Padlam Naiko (of Kaliaguda) and a 'party of soldiers' to 'raid' the opium shop at Salimi, eight miles west of Sindhabeda. About 3 p.m., the contingent reached the opium shop owned by S. Chandrasekhar Pattnaik,<sup>61</sup> which was situated in the verandah of his house. The crowd destroyed thirty-eight *tolas* of opium. Bhima Naiko tore up the account book of Pattnaik who was then thrown out by the scruff of his neck. By this time Laxman's fame had spread all over Malkangiri. It came to be generally believed that he was the future king of Malkangiri.

The messianic trait which formed an integral component of the revolt was also associated with Lal Raja (whose real name was Moti Singh), the *naiko* of Tonguguda (in the Malkangiri police station area). He had been recruited as a four-anna member of the Congress around 1940. Being a village *naiko*, 'he could naturally wield his influence' in the Tonguguda area. Laxman and Balaram Pujari met him at the Damapalli 'shandy' (market) on 19 August 1942 and he was sent to 'attack' the out-still liquor shop of Pushapally (also in the Malkangiri police station area). The crowd, composed of tribals and non-tribals (some were outcastes) 'raided'

the shop at 4 p.m. on 19 August 1942. The *sahukar*, Dayanidhi, was directed to close his shop for good as British *raj* had ended and *swaraj* had been set up, and no taxes or revenue would be paid. A number of articles (distillation apparatus, buckets, etc.) were destroyed, and the total loss was said to have amounted to Rs. 60. When Dayanidhi interfered during this 'raid' he was physically evicted by Lal Raja.

The climax was reached at a huge meeting organised at Mathili on 21 August 1942. Since about 17 August 1942 the police authorities had apprehended that this would take the form of a 'raid' on the police station at Mathili.<sup>62</sup> In fact Mathili was the epicentre of a very widespread campaign which had stirred up Malkangiri and the western portion of the neighbouring Jeypore *taluk* (especially Ambaguda and Udoyogiri). What seems to have made the estate authorities and the police panic was the fear that these activities would rouse the Bondas whom they dreaded, since the latter remained comparatively isolated and were looked upon as a fierce, war-like tribe.<sup>63</sup>

On 21 August 1942 the opium shop at the Revenue Inspector's office at Mathili was 'raided'.<sup>64</sup> Following this, a crowd of about a thousand people reached the Mathili police station at about 9.30 a.m., singing the *Ramdhun* and carrying Congress flags. It raised slogans like *Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai*. These people were stopped by the police about two hundred yards east of the police station. After an argument with the policemen, the crowd withdrew to the nearby *hat* in a procession. Here Laxman made a speech informing the audience that the British Government was gone and that Gandhi was their king. After this the crowd (the number of which had swelled) marched enthusiastically towards the Mathili police station, around 2 p.m. Here Laxman again made a speech; as he put it, Gandhi *raj* had replaced British *raj*, and the 'shandy' and forest dues no longer had to be paid.<sup>65</sup> It is clear from the contemporary official reports that the crowd remained peaceful. Its basic aim was to disobey Government orders, have a meeting and hoist a Congress flag in the police station as a symbol of defiance, and court arrest.<sup>66</sup>

In the tussle that followed, the police found a pretext for the *lathi-charge* and the subsequent firing. Laxman was injured during the *lathi-charge* and fell down unconscious, and it was the police firing that killed Ramayya, a forest guard, and some nine to eleven other demonstrators.<sup>67</sup>

In the trial, the crowd was described as a 'violent mob' which wanted to burn down the police station, kill the officers and loot the Malkangiri treasury. Since Laxman was viewed as a potential

threat by the estate as well as the colonial administration, he was singled out and charged with the murder of the forest guard, Ramayya. The authorities unleashed a reign of terror to smother the storm and to secure witnesses. In spite of this, the bulk of the witnesses they got were servants of the estate or the colonial administration, and only nine (out of twenty-eight) of them were able to say anything regarding Laxman's role in the death of Ramayya.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Laxman was given a death sentence.

#### IV

As we have seen, the Quit India movement assumed significant proportions in Malkangiri. That this was based on the existing *fituri* tradition and strong pressures from below (which existed even prior to the advent of the Congress organization in this area) needs hardly to be emphasized. What needs to be explained is the convergence of this revolt with the all-India movement. The sharpening contradictions between colonialism and the estate on the one hand, and the people of Malkangiri on the other, proved to be the basis of this development. We have suggested that this was due in large measure to the erosion of traditional rights and the creation of new burdens. In this latter category, the War collections played an important role. These pressures, undoubtedly, had a unifying role and linked Malkangiri (as well as the entire *zamindari*)<sup>69</sup> with Indian nationalism.

The unity from below not only nullified the oft cited tribal-non-tribal dichotomy, but also reduced divisions along lines of caste. An interesting incident is recounted regarding a person from Malipara (Nuagaon), a *mali* by caste, who was sent a chit which ordered him to keep food ready for two hundred Congressmen. This person was affluent compared to his 'co-villagers'. Self-invited guests numbering about a hundred attended the feast. Tribals and non-tribals (including five *malis* out of ten leaders, and probably some untouchables as well) participated and invited their *mali* host to join them, threatening the latter with 'direct' polluting action when he declined their invitation.

Tables IV and V throw some light on the composition of the crowds that participated in the revolt. Here we find inter-tribal unity. Similarly, the hillmen/plainsmen dichotomy does not seem to have any relevance since most of the PCC leaders like Biswasroi, Sahu and Tripathy were from the plains.<sup>72</sup> Further, one finds this revolt subsuming divisions along lines of caste, and uniting some *mustajars* with tenants, agricultural and non-

Table IV

*Incidents prior to the meeting at Mathili*<sup>70</sup>

Incident	Date	Place	Total number of persons accused	Tribals and out-castes	Non-tribals
1	16.8.1942	Badhigar	8	4	4
2	17.8.1942	Kuntipally	27	23	4
3	18.8.1942	Salimi	26	21	5
4	19.8.1942	Pushpalli	29	27	2
5	23.8.1942	Nuagaon	Details	not	known
6	Not known	Malipara	10	5	5

Table V

*Persons arrested in connection with the Mathili Police Station Episode (total 54)*<sup>71</sup>

<u>Tribal Group/Caste</u>					
Bhumiyas	Kutias	Gaudas	Paikas/Ranas	Outcastes	Others
36	(Khondas) 5	3	2	2	6
<u>Occupation</u>					
Naikos	Cultivators (including naikos)	Agricultural and non-agricultural labourers		Teacher	
13	45	8		1	

agricultural labourers. This latter phenomenon was possible owing to the nature of stratification and the position of the *mustajars*. Two trends converged in this revolt—the struggles against immediate exploiters (i.e. the estate, oppressive *mustajars* and *sahukars*), and those more directly against the colonial government (for example, issues such as the tax on opium, the War contributions, etc.).



The messianic and millenarian traits of the *fituri* tradition were vital components of the revolt. The former was associated with some of the leaders of the movement, like Laxman and Lal Raja, as well as Gandhi, who were looked upon as saviours by the Malkangiri folk. The convergence of several myths of deliverance—Laxman *raj*, Gandhi *raj* and *swaraj*—served to strengthen the unity from below, and direct this revolt not only against the immediate exploiters but also against alien domination.

The collapse of the British *raj* was supposed to mark the advent of a new age in which there would be no oppressive taxes, and lost rights would be recovered. This notion coupled with the identification of the PCC as the most important instrument of social redress, made the crowds seek legitimacy for its actions from the Congress, even if these actions did not conform to the Congress programme.

Although various features of the revolt resembled the *fituri* tradition, the struggles in the 1938-42 phase, together with the inroads of the PCC, brought about certain changes in organization and practice. After 9 August 1942, when the PCC was declared illegal, the actions of the people of Malkangiri moved closer to the established *fituri* tradition. For example, the marches through the forests were very much in line with it. There was, however, little attempt at serious preparation for armed struggle. An important difference was made by the presence of the Congress and the injection of the notion of *swaraj*, which was identified here with the re-assertion of lost rights and resisting increased burdens.<sup>73</sup>

By adjusting itself to popular pressures in the 1937-42 phase, the PCC not only increased its influence over Malkangiri, but also drew it into the all-India movement. Nevertheless, the support of the PCC imposed certain constraints on the revolt. This was chiefly due to its links with the *zamindari* after the 1937 elections. Moreover, the importance of the *mustajars* in the movement was a reflection of the PCC's preference for comparatively 'respectable' allies. In various places a tension developed between popular militancy and the restrained political action favoured by the PCC. The distribution of opium, eating as self-invited guests, the zeal to harass oppressive *mustajars*, the destruction of the accounts of *sahukars* and attempts to hit out against the barriers of caste were examples of the former. Activities relating to 'prohibition', and limited opposition to forest and excise dues, represented the other stream and was clearly associated with the PCC's propertied allies in Malkangiri. However, the destruction of liquor shops and the distillation apparatus suggests a rather serious departure from Gandhian methods of boycott or picketing. What should not be overlooked is the close connection between exploitative *sahukars*

and the liquor trade, which made them obvious targets of such 'attacks'.

What emerges is the co-existence and interpenetration of these two streams in the movement, indicating at one level the rather weak hold of the PCC over the revolt. Thus, even on the day of the Mathili firing we come across a 'raid' on the opium shop (which was, interestingly, situated at the Revenue Inspector's office) and a symbolic defiance of the British *raj*. Another feature that needs to be stressed is that although slogans against *bethi* and *goti* had been raised, our evidence does not suggest that it was an integral component of the revolt. This was perhaps because some of the prominent leaders were *mustajars*, including Laxman himself. Consequently, it may be said that the association with the PCC dampened the social transformative content of the revolt.

The aftermath of the revolt saw the Congress as an important force in Malkangiri. After the Mathili tragedy and Laxman's arrest, a violent crowd nearly set fire to the Mathili police station. It was the intervention of Radhamohan Sahu that averted this.<sup>74</sup> The PCC's negotiating role, coupled with the absence of any other political alternative, contributed significantly to its growing popularity. The electoral successes of Radhamohan Sahu (in the 1946 Legislative Assembly elections from the Jeypore-Malkangiri constituency) symbolized how the PCC reaped the benefits of the '42 revolt in Malkangiri.

Laxman Naiko was hanged in the Berhampur jail on 29 March 1943. When Sadasiva Tripathy met him before his execution, Laxman told him that he would have been much happier if he had seen *swaraj* before his death.<sup>75</sup> A police party which visited Tentuligumma in December 1943, found that Laxman's relatives and 'co-villagers' firmly believed that he was still alive in Sambalpur jail.<sup>76</sup> When T. Sanganna toured Malkangiri after his election to the Parliament in 1952,<sup>77</sup> a rumour circulated that Laxman had returned as a minister—a reward for his earlier contribution. People came from various parts of Malkangiri to see him, only to return disappointed.<sup>78</sup> The 'living' Laxman reflects the unresolved contradictions and the unfulfilled dreams of the Malkangiri folk.

## Notes

1. Till 1936 the Jeypore estate (or, the present-day Koraput district) was a part of the Madras Presidency.
2. For the *fituri* tradition, see D. Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839-1924' in R. Guha, (ed), *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi, 1982); and M. Atlury, 'Allury Sitaram Raju and the Mamjam Rebellion of 1922-24', *Social Scientist*, No. 131 (April 1984).

3. N. C. Behuria, *Final Report on the Major Settlement Operations in Koraput district 1938-64* (Cuttack, 1966), pp. 55, 68. It seems that the estate exercised a rather strong control since the *Report on Land Administration in the Districts of Ganjam and Koraput 1938-39* (Cuttack, 1940) stated that there was no village establishment maintained by the Government.
4. R. C. S. Bell, *Orissa District Gazetteers: Koraput* (Cuttack, 1945), p.137. In Behuria, *op.cit.*, p. 6, it is clearly mentioned that prior to 1952 all the forests in the district were owned by the Maharaja of Jeypore.
5. *Report of the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee Orissa 1940* (hereafter RPEAEC) (Cuttack, 1940), pp. 17-18, 26, 53.
6. *Ibid.*, p.18. *Podu* caused a great deal of 'concern' to the authorities; Bell, *op.cit.*, p.106. Unfortunately, we do not have any data on the proportion of settled/shifting cultivators. Remnants of this method have survived up to this day in the district.
7. Behuria, *op.cit.*, p.114.
8. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.114.
9. *Ibid.*, p.115; women were paid at the rate of two to three annas per day.
10. *Ibid.*, p.116.
11. RPEAEC, pp. 49-50.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 43; on p. 201, it is mentioned by R.K. Biswasroi that even 'hill-men' (most probably *mustajars*) recruited *gotis*. Behuria, *op.cit.*, p.19, notes that in the 1940s, Koyas, Parojas and others from the estate migrated to the tea plantations of Assam.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
14. *Ibid.*, p.173; Bell, *op.cit.*, p.114. Whereas per plough the 'hill-men' paid 8 to 12 annas, the 'non-hillmen' paid between 8 annas and Rs.2/-; RPEAEC, p. 28.
15. Behuria, *op.cit.*, p. 6. The erosion of the forest rights had been a comparatively gradual process in coastal Orissa, where it had started a century before. Cf. Amar Farooqi, 'British Forest Policy in Kumaon 1890-1928' (unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Delhi University, 1981), which analyses the way in which profit motives penetrated the Kumaon forests; the basic features he discusses are common to Malkangiri as well.
16. Nilmani Senapati and N. K. Sahu, *Gazetteer of India: Orissa-Koraput*, (Cuttack, 1966), p.178.
17. Interview with Shri Gopinath Pujari of Mendiculi (Mathili), who was nearly twenty years old in 1942.
18. Senapati and Sahu, *op.cit.*, p.78.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
20. RPEAEC, p. 29.
21. Bell, *op.cit.*, p.116.
22. Senapati and Sahu, *op.cit.*, pp. 39, 52.
23. R. C. S. Bell, *Census of India 1941, XI. Orissa*, p. 33.
24. This table is based on the *Report on Land Administration in the Districts of Ganjam and Koraput 1936-1942* (Cuttack, 1937-1943). It is not clear whether these lands included both *mustajari* and tenant lands.
25. RPEAEC, p.43.
26. Interview with Shri Damodhar Samantarai (Jeypore), who was the first person to attract my attention towards this aspect. Interviews with Shri Ramayya Dhangramajhi (an associate of Laxman of Gongla, near Mathili) and Sreemati Kausalya (Laxman's daughter, of Mathili) served to cross-check the question of the 'joint land'. Samantarai could not say whether the couples, who were asked to leave, left permanently or not. My feeling is that they rejoined their relatives once they were in a position to work.

27. Confidential File on Laxman Naiko (hereafter CFLN) at the Mathili police station; I am thankful to the Superintendent of Police, Koraput district, for allowing me to use this extremely valuable document.
28. Behuria, *op.cit.*, p. 68; Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen', pp. 126-9.
29. M. Venkatarangaiya (ed.), *The Freedom Movement in Andhra Pradesh, Vol.III* (Hyderabad, 1965) pp. 87-88, 382
30. Dasarathi Nanda, *Saheed Laxman Naik* (Oriya) (Berhampur, 1977), p.35, refers to Laxman's contacts with the *fituri*, and his *desari* traits. Sumit Sarkar, 'Primitive Rebellion and Modern Nationalism : A Note on Forest Satyagraha in the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1977, p.516, points to Raju wandering among the tribals claiming astrological and medicinal powers. This obviously enabled him to move closer to the people.
31. For an account of popular responses in Koraput during the 1929-34 phase, see Biswamoy Pati, 'Peasants, Tribals and the National Movement in Orissa 1921-1936' (Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Delhi University, 1980)
32. *RPEAEC*, p. 56, mentioned that eleven tribes in the Koraput district were not allowed to vote in the elections under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935; this included Parojas, Khonds, Koyas, Gadabas and Dombs. (In fact, the Dombs were non-tribal outcastes.) Although I do not have exact figures, the fact that the tribal population and some others were barred from the vote, and the high property qualification (at least Rs.2 in rent per year), meant that a very small proportion of the people made up the electorate.
33. Balabhadra Pujari, *Saheed Bira Laxman Naik* (Oriya) (Bhubaneswar, n.d.) p.11. The Utkala Sammilani had sought to unify Orissa and was a virtually spent force in this context; it was backed by the *zamindars* and some native chiefs of Orissa. Pujari refers to Bidyadhar Singh Deo as the son-in-law of the Maharaja of Jeypore. However, in Govt. of India, Home Political, file No. 4/13/1938, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), he is referred to as the Maharaja's nephew.
34. *Indian Annual Register*, July-December, 1937, p. 268. A result of this assurance was the Partially Excluded Areas Enquiry Committee.
35. This becomes clear if one goes through the Govt. of India, Home Political Fortnighly Reports (hereafter FR), file Nos.18/7/1938 and 18/9/1938, NAI.
36. FR 18/11/1938, NAI; and interview: 'Samantarai.
37. Govt. of India, Home Political F. No. 4/13/1938.
38. FR 18/10/1938, NAI.
39. Cited in *RPEAEC* p. 26.
40. FR 18/6/1938, NAI. It may be noted that the Bastar state had common borders with Jeypore *taluk*. Laxman was active in the Ramgiri forest range (which was in the Jeypore *taluk*, bordering Bastar) in the 1940-41 phase.
41. FR 18/4/1938, NAI.
42. Govt. of India, Home Poll, F. No. 18/7/1938, NAI.
43. *Indian Annual Register*. Vol.II, July-December, 1942, p.194.
44. FR. 18/11/1939, NAI.
45. Interview: Samantarai; R.K. Biswasroi, *Koraput Zilla Congress Itibriti. Orissa Rajaniti Ebon Eka Nua Pradeshara Parikalpana* (Oriya), (Jeypore, 1973) pp. 32-33, served to cross-check this evidence.
46. Govt. of India, Home Poll., F.No. 4/13/1938.
47. B.S: Deo, *The Goti System in Jeypore Agency* (Jeypore, 1939) p.7. Unfortunately, I have not been able to see his paper on the *bethi* system.
48. FR 18/6/1939, NAI.

49. CFLN ; S. Sanganna, 'Revolts in Orissa—Martyr Laxman Naik: A Hero of the Freedom Movement', in V. Raghavaiah (ed.), *Tribal Revolts* (Nellore, 1971) p. 249.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 250, and CFLN. The selection of the Ramgiri region seems to be particularly striking considering that there is a huge *mela* at Gupteshwar (in this tract) on *sivaratri*. Even today tribal as well as non-tribal people from parts of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh (both bordering the Koraput district) and the Koraput district attend it. This festival usually falls in the dry season, when it is not very difficult to move around in this forested region. Although the exact time when Laxman offered individual *satyagraha* is not known, this place was selected because of its importance as an area in which a lot of people gathered.
51. Our evidence does not indicate that Laxman campaigned against the tax on opium. The War collections increased the burdens and created the basis for a strong unity from below. Out of the twenty-two people arrested in connection with the anti-War slogans in the district there were tribals, non-tribals and outcastes; based on FR 18/2/1941, NAI. That Koraput district was the leading district in the province of Orissa as regards the War collections becomes evident from *ibid.*
52. Interview with Shri Krushna Chandra Bisoi, Jeypore.
53. Interview with Laxman's daughter, Kausalya.
54. Nanda, *op.cit.*, pp. 72, 76; and Sanganna, *op.cit.*, p. 250.
55. CLFN and Mahtab and De (ed.), *History of the Freedom Movement in Orissa* (Cuttack, 1957), Vol.IV, p. 91.
56. (Koraput Collectorate Record Room) SC No. 18/1942, 'Judgement in Late Laxman Naik Case'; I am thankful to the Collector, Koraput district, for allowing me to use this document.
57. Mahtab and De (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 91. They point to the fact that these people were 'armed with saplings, cudgels and *lathis*. forgetting that it is a very common practice for people to move about 'armed' in this way in the forest tracts. *Ibid.*, Vol.V, p.87, it was mentioned that the 'property of Messrs. H. Dear & Co. ... was made a target of attack'. Unfortunately, we do not have exact details of such activities in the Malkangiri area.
58. This section is generally based on CFLN; my narrative of incidents follows the sequence given in this file.
59. It may be noted that Pátros and Bisois are mostly non-tribals.
60. Compare the role of the market-place in pre-industrial Europe; G. Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (London, 1973), esp., ch. 2.
61. His name suggests that he was most probably a *kumuti*, from coastal Andhra Pradesh (S. Chandrasekhar is a Telugu name), who perhaps sought to re-adjust to this place (Pattnaik is an Oriya title) to carry on his activities.
62. (Koraput Collectorate), SC No. 18/1942. It should be added here that Mathili had one of the best attended *hats* in Malkangiri; Behuria, *op.cit.*, p. 39. Perhaps this was another reason which caused anxiety to the authorities.
63. Nityananda Das, 'Martyr Laxman Naik : A Hero of the Freedom Movement', *Adivasi*, Vol.IX, No.1 (April 1967) p. 24.
64. Mahtab and De (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. V, p. 88.
65. SC No. 18/1942; and, the Patna High Court Decision, cited by Mahtab and De, *op.cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 44-8 (appendix).
66. N. Das, *op.cit.*, p. 25. Sanganna, *op.cit.*, p. 252, mentions the attempt to hoist the flag. In a letter signed by Laxman, it is stated that these people were eager to court arrest; cited by Pujari, *op.cit.*, p. 20. Interview: Gopinath Pujari, matched with the evidence cited.

67. Nanda, *op.cit.*, p. 93. Several people were also injured. According to CFLN, only two people died.
68. For the Patna High Court's judgement, see Mahtab & De, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, pp. 44-8; for details of repression, Biswasroi *op.cit.*, p. 26. It may be worth mentioning here that the Malkangiri treasury was nearly forty-five kilometres away.
69. For the '42 movement in the Koraput district see Mahtab and De (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vols. IV and V.
70. This is based on CFLN.
71. This is based on D. Nanda, *op.cit.*, pp. 118-20.
72. The popularity enjoyed by the Koraput Congress leaders in Malkangiri was remarkable. When I interviewed Dhangramajhi, he started crying while describing how people felt when Radhamohan Sahu died. It may be noted here that this was not a revolt of the Khonds alone as is suggested by Raghavaiah, *op.cit.*, in the dedication to this book, p. iii.
73. One may quote here an interesting observation by Rude on the forces motivating popular protest: 'Though originally derived from outside ... (political motives) were given a particular twist in course of their assimilation by the small masters, craftsmen and wage-earners, who adapted them as it were to their own social and political needs'; George Rude, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (London, 1974), pp. 32-3.
74. Interview: Dhangramajhi.
75. Interview: Samantarai. The ruling class of Orissa has honoured Laxman by naming certain institutions in the Koraput district after him and building his statue at Mathili, which, I was told, does not resemble him !
76. CFLN.
77. T. Sanganna was elected as the unopposed Congress candidate from the Rayagada—Phulbani parliamentary constituency.
78. Interview: Pujari.



# QUIT INDIA IN MADRAS : HIATUS OR CLIMACTERIC?

DAVID ARNOLD

Studies of Quit India have generally attached the highest importance to the events of August 1942 and their political aftermath. The movement has been described as 'a landmark in India's struggle for freedom...the last and, undoubtedly, the bitterest fight for freedom ever waged against the British in India, ... surpass[ing] all the earlier movements including the Great Revolt of 1857 in dimensions and intensity'.<sup>1</sup> It has been identified as 'India's revolution', the critical act of defiance which forced the British to leave India 'because Indians had made it impossible for them to stay'.<sup>2</sup> But, as the essays in this volume remind us, Quit India has a dual perspective. It can be seen as contributing to the weakening of the British capacity or resolve to hold on to India, so bringing independence measurably nearer. But Quit India was also revealing of tensions, conflicts and contradictions within the nationalist movement and the Congress party. It was an important internal crisis—of identity, method and purpose—as much as an episode in the continuing contest between the Congress and the Raj.

Madras has figured no more than cursorily in most accounts of Quit India. Attention, understandably, has focused on the north—Bihar, UP, to a lesser extent, Bombay and Bengal—for it was across that broad belt of northern India that the most dramatic events occurred, where British power appeared most in jeopardy, and where the movement was at its most popular, violent and sustained. Not for the first time, Madras is seen to be somewhat secondary or peripheral, turning in a no more than modest effort midway between the mass upheaval of Bihar and the seeming quiescence of Punjab. Hutchins refers to the 'moderate but significant' strength of the movement in Madras.<sup>3</sup> Sarkar calls it 'relatively weak' except in coastal Andhra and in Coimbatore and Ramnad districts of Tamilnad, and adds, pertinently, that 'Rajaji's



opposition may have been a significant factor in Tamilnadu, while Communist hostility helped to keep the agitation at a low key in Kerala'.<sup>4</sup> That there was a movement at all in the south was important in establishing this as an all-India, and not merely a regional or localized, challenge to British rule. But, reverting to the significance of Quit India for the Congress, an understanding of the movement in Madras may enable us to reach a broader understanding of the party and the country in 1942 than concentrating upon the more active and radical areas alone. It is important, too, from the perspective of the history of Madras, to try to find a context for the movement in the political evolution of the southern presidency.

## I

In the opening months of 1942 Madras Presidency appeared to be in the frontline of a Japanese invasion of India. No longer a distant threat, the war grew daily nearer and more menacing. 'Almost the only subject talked about here', wrote the Governor of Madras on 4 January 1942, 'is the war situation in the East.'<sup>5</sup> For Madras the bombing of Rangoon in December 1941, the fall of Singapore in mid-February 1942, and the collapse of British resistance in Burma a month later, had an added importance and immediacy, for a great majority of Indians in Malaya and Burma were from Madras, especially the Tamil districts. Refugees from Burma, arriving in Madras in early 1942, brought reports of heavy civilian casualties from Japanese bombing, the inadequacy of British defences, and the authorities' seeming indifference to the safety of any but their own kind.<sup>6</sup> From late December 1941 large numbers of people, at first mainly women and children, began to leave Madras for the interior districts. From a city of three-quarters of a million, roughly a third had left by early February.<sup>7</sup> April brought the war palpably closer. On 5 April Japanese planes bombed Colombo. The next day they attacked ships and harbour installations at Kakinada (Cocanada) and Vishakhapatnam (Vizagapatam), causing a fresh exodus from the coast and raising new doubts about British defences. An anticipated air-raid on Madras city on 7 April failed to materialize, but, on the 11th, Southern Command, believing a Japanese invasion to be imminent, advised the evacuation of the provincial capital. The Secretariat was moved to Ootacamund and Chittoor, the High Court to Coimbatore, the Board of Revenue to Salem, and the Inspector-General of Police to Vellore, leaving the Governor in Madras with a skeletal staff. All those who could leave the city were advised to

do so, and a further 200,000 people departed within a week.<sup>8</sup> The invasion never came, but this latest demonstration of British ineptitude was not lost on the Congressmen of the province. C. Rajagopalachari, the veteran Tamil Congress leader, reflected a popular mood with his repeated declarations that the British could no longer save south India from the Japanese: only an Indian government, preferably a Congress government, could do it.<sup>9</sup> The Congress Working Committee meeting at Allahabad in late April, did not share Rajagopalachari's view that the time was right for the Congress to resume office even under the existing constitutional arrangements, but it linked the 'lessons of Rangoon and Lower Burma' with the 'recent astonishing exhibition of panic and incompetence in Madras' as evidence of the 'dangers arising from inefficient and irresponsible officials, who have....no contacts with [the] people of the country'.<sup>10</sup>

The war was being felt in other ways too. Prices of food grains and other basic commodities had risen only gradually during the first two years of the war. The working-class price index for Madras city (which took the week before the outbreak of the war in Europe as its baseline) rose from 100 in September 1939 to 108 by July 1940 and to 115 by August 1941. It peaked at 123 in mid-December 1941; then, as newly-harvested grain became available, fell back to 116 in late January 1942.<sup>11</sup> But adverse factors were beginning to mount—a poor dry-grain harvest and near famine conditions in the Ceded Districts, the abrupt cessation of the Burmese rice imports on which Madras had grown so dependent in recent decades, and the encouragement that fears of shortages and invasion gave to hoarding and profiteering. Against this the Madras government retreated only gingerly from its customary laissez-faire to piecemeal controls over grain pricing and marketing. From 119 in May 1942, the Madras price index rose 13 points to 132 by late June and a further 6 to 138 at the end of August.

In some mofussil towns, like Kozhikode (Calicut) on the west coast, the price index rose faster and steeper.<sup>12</sup> The late summer was always an anxious time in the grain bazaars—prices rose as stocks fell or deficient rainfall roused fears of dearth and hunger. It was at that time of year that grain riots and looting had been most common in the past. 1942 was no exception. On 7 June a hundred people looted a rice mill at Kallidaikurichi in Tirunelveli (Tinnevely) district: similar incidents followed in East Godavari, Krishna (Kistna), Vishakhapatnam and South Arcot, and persisted till the end of 1942.<sup>13</sup> This was the most widespread and persistent looting since 1918,<sup>14</sup> but, though anxiety over grain

prices and availability may have been a background factor, there is no evidence that it contributed directly to the strength of the movement in Madras or that Congressmen made any attempt to use the issue to broaden the appeal of their campaign. Quit India in Madras was more narrowly 'political' and less influenced by economic undercurrents than the earlier agitations of 1918-22 and 1930-33 had been.

Other economic consequences also stemmed from the war's proximity. Handloom weavers, especially those involved in the production of *lungis* normally exported to Malaya and Burma, and *beedi*-makers were hit by the sudden loss of export markets in southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup> The invasion scares, along with the upturn in food prices, prompted industrial and other urban workers to demand extra allowances for the evacuation of their families or higher wages to compensate for rising living costs. Some argued, as in the First World War, that they were entitled to a share of the profits being made from military contracts. Sporadic strikes began in workshops and mills in Madras city in January 1942, but soon affected smaller centres like Tiruchirappalli (Trichinopoly) and Koilpatti as well, and, like the grain looting, continued intermittently for the rest of the year. At the European-owned Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras a dispute which began on 19 February rumbled on until 6 April when the management agreed to a special evacuation allowance. They conceded a further 'dearness allowance' in December.<sup>16</sup> In the main, industrial unrest continued on its own course independently of Quit India. The Congress was either unwilling or unable to profit from it.

Industrial workers remained largely, but not entirely, aloof. A fresh strike broke out at the Buckingham and Carnatic mills in August and continued until 21 September. How far it owed its inspiration to Quit India or was a new phase in the recurrent dispute over bonuses and allowances is not clear.<sup>17</sup> At Coimbatore, where the factories were Indian-owned, some mills closed down temporarily in August 1942 apparently in sympathy with the Quit India movement. On 24 August workers at a mill at Singanallur near Coimbatore went on strike and two days later 'roaming gangs of mill strikers' attacked sheds at the Sular airfield, destroying 22 lorries and accidentally burning three drivers to death. The strikers were also implicated in the earlier derailing of an ammunitions train at nearby Podanur,<sup>18</sup> while operatives at another Coimbatore mill were fired on by police in mid-August because of their 'threatening attitude'.<sup>19</sup>

Railway workers, who had shown their militancy and disruptive capabilities during the South Indian Railway strike of 1928,<sup>20</sup> but

who had taken virtually no part in civil disobedience in the early 1930s, seem also to have remained aloof from Quit India. Three days before his arrest on 17 August, V. V. Giri, a leading railway unionist as well as minister for industries and labour in the 1937-9 Madras Congress ministry, called upon railwaymen to support the movement.<sup>21</sup> His appeal seems to have had no effect, though it is possible that the extensive railway sabotage that occurred during the first phase of the movement in Madras had the benefit of the railwaymen's expertise. Their aloofness was encouraged by the strong position held by communist or pro-communist leaders in the railway unions. Speakers at the South Indian Railway conference at Tiruchirappalli in 16 August spoke against Quit India and in favour of supporting the 'people's war' alongside Russia and China.<sup>22</sup>

One reason why Quit India did not acquire greater momentum in Madras was that the 1937-9 provincial Congress ministry had shown itself to be less than sympathetic towards industrial labour and had several times used police violence against strikers or aligned itself firmly with the industrialists and managers.<sup>23</sup> In August 1942 it paid the price for its neglect and disdain. By 1942 most of the left-wingers had already abandoned the Congress for the Communist Party, and on their release from prison in July of that year they actively supported the CPI's pro-war stance. In Tamilnad, Mohan Kumaramangalam strenuously condemned government repression against the Congress, but no less vigorously denounced attempts to sabotage the war effort.<sup>24</sup> In Malabar, an active centre of Civil Disobedience ten years earlier and the scene of growing agrarian and industrial conflict in the late 1930s, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, A. K. Gopalan and other former Congressmen or Congress Socialists had left in October 1940 to establish the Communist Party of Kerala. They took with them much of the organizational strength and local leadership of the Congress in Malabar.<sup>25</sup> It is striking that the Congress Socialist Party, which played such an influential part in sustaining and radicalizing the Quit India Movement in the north, was almost entirely absent from the southern presidency. Only among students does it appear to have commanded much support. Thus it was the Communist Party, not the beleaguered Congress, which was able to take up the issues of high prices, shortages and wages in the second half of 1942 and early 1943 and thereby underscored the narrowness of the Congress appeal.<sup>26</sup>

Students, and such Congress organizers and activists as escaped the first wave of arrests on 9-11 August, were the mainstay of Quit India in Madras. V. K. Narasimhan describes in his biography of

K. Kamaraj Nadar, who since 1940 had been President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, how he evaded the police waiting to arrest him and other provincial Congress leaders at Arkonam on their return from the AICC meeting at Bombay on 8 August. Kamaraj then travelled through North and South Arcot, Thanjavur (Tanjore), Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and finally to his home district of Ramanathapuram (Ramnad) before giving himself up to the police. At each stop on the way Kamaraj made contact with party activists, passed on directions for the conduct of Quit India and provided general encouragement. As the police acknowledged, his journey gave an important impetus to the movement especially in the southern Tamil districts.<sup>27</sup> In Andhra, Congress leaders had met at the end of July to discuss how the campaign should be conducted, and as the 'Andhra Circular' testified, the district committees were well primed for action.<sup>28</sup>

Quit India was also, as Bhuyan describes it, 'a movement of the youth'.<sup>29</sup> The events of August-September 1942 were responsible for inducting into the nationalist movement a new generation of committed party activists, in much the same way as had the agitational movements of 1918-22 and 1930-3. The Madras and Annamalai universities were prominent centres of the movement, especially the latter, which had already acquired a reputation for being radical and unruly. Students there organized the boycott of schools and colleges, held processions and meetings, hoisted the national flag on university buildings and finally forced the university authorities to close the campus for more than a month from 10 September to 20 October. 25 students at Annamalai were detained and 44 others convicted, but they were again active early the following year with the celebration of Independence Day and demonstrations in connection with Gandhi's fast in February.<sup>30</sup> Although the students undoubtedly played some part in acts of sabotage and incendiarism, they did not move out into the countryside, carrying the movement with them, in the way that students from say, Benares or Patna did in UP and Bihar.

With the arrest of most of the province's established Congress leaders, Quit India brought into prominence party activists who had previously occupied only minor position in the Congress organization. In Tirunelveli, for instance, these included K. T. Kosalram, who had been old enough to participate in picketing during Civil Disobedience a decade earlier and had become a member of the Tiruchendur Taluk Congress Committee, and his nephew, M. S. Selvaraj. They were 28 and 20 respectively in 1942. Largely through their initiative, Quit India in the taluk took on the character of a popular movement, culminating on 20 September in

an attack on salt works near Arumuganeri during which an Anglo-Indian salt inspector was killed. Through the part they played in the movement, Kosalram and Selvaraj became leading Congressmen in the locality, gaining election to the provincial legislature after independence and dominating the district Congress organization for nearly twenty years.<sup>31</sup> In other districts, too, Quit India created a new generation, if not of party bosses, at least of heroes and martyrs.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly, Kosalram and Selvaraj, like Kamaraj, were Nadars, members of a once lowly and despised community. If Civil Disobedience in the early 1930s had helped to bring leading peasant castes like the Gounders of Coimbatore into the Congress,<sup>33</sup> Quit India (in some areas) appears to have enabled the active involvement of lower-ranking, though not necessarily unprosperous, communities like the Nadars. Quit India had too something of the character of a generational revolt in Madras and represented the reaffirmation by youths and party activists of the Congress agitational tradition. The 1937-9 Congress ministry had left many of the younger generation of activists and sympathizers bewildered, even alienated, by the remoteness of the party leadership, their preoccupation with government, and disregard for the opinions of local party workers. Rajagopalachari's attempt to 'impose' Hindi on the schools of the region was bitterly resented among the new generation and provoked a strong agitation directed *against* the Congress.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Quit India was a movement which students and youths across a broad political spectrum could identify with and make their own. From feeling excluded and oppressed, they could again feel part of a dynamic struggle for freedom.

In the forms it took, Quit India in Madras was more a revival or intensification of the kinds of agitation practised during previous Congress movements rather than a radically different kind of campaign. Attacks on railway stations and the derailment of trains, a primary feature of the movement in the Tamil and Telugu districts from about 11 to 20 August, had, it is true, no direct parallel in the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements; but the cutting of telegraph wires, pulling of communication cords on trains, setting fire to post boxes, and even recourse to minor explosive or incendiary devices, had all been present in the earlier movements, especially in 1932-3.<sup>35</sup> There were precedents, too, for attacks on the police, though Quit India in Madras constituted far less of a climacteric in this respect than in Bihar, UP, the Central Provinces and Orissa. Hostility to the police was not something which the Congress had alone called into being, but

it had long since become part of the party's populist appeal. Congress, it might be said, was as well the party of Chauri Chaura as the party of the *charka*.<sup>36</sup> In addition to several attacks on police stations and outposts in the province in August-September 1942, there were also clashes (notably at Pulankurichi in Ramanathapuram around 20 August and a month later at a village near Koilpatti in Tirunelveli district) in which popular antipathy to the police played a major part.<sup>37</sup> Other forms of protest—from the passing of resolutions in support of the Congress by municipal and local boards to the picketing of toddy shops and sales—also had their counterparts in the earlier Congress agitations. In this respect, therefore, the lines of continuity with previous movements were strong, and Quit India does not appear as different from them as is often suggested.

Something of the nature and scale of the movement in Madras can be deduced from the official statistics. The police opened fire 21 times during the movement, inflicting 39 fatal and 86 non-fatal casualties (these figures are particularly unreliable as many casualties were never known to the police or reported by them). Significantly, there was only one recorded police 'defection' in the province, and no fatal police casualties were recorded. 5 police stations or outposts were destroyed or severely damaged, with more than a hundred other government or public buildings coming under attack. In addition to 17 bomb explosions, 35 bombs or explosive devices were discovered without damage. 41 collective fines were imposed on towns and villages, amounting to Rs. 1034,359 in all. There were nearly 6,000 arrests, and 295 sentences of whipping. 27 local authorities were suspended for passing pro-Congress resolutions.<sup>38</sup> Such figures are, of course, a very crude index of the scale and nature of the movement and of the government repression with which it was met. They give no indication, for example, of the involvement of troops, widely used in the province between August and October for their 'deterrent effect'.<sup>39</sup> But they do provide some basis for comparison with Quit India in other parts of India and possibly with earlier campaigns in Madras. In Bombay the police opened fire 226 times during Quit India, in UP 116 times, in Bihar 96: there was even one more firing in Delhi than the whole of the Madras presidency. While only five Madras police stations suffered serious attack, more than 70 were plundered or destroyed in Bihar, 40 or more in UP and Bombay. The 6,000 arrests in Madras compare with over 16,000 in Bihar and Bengal and over 24,000 in Bombay.<sup>40</sup> To make such a comparison is not to belittle the scale and importance of the movement in Madras or to advance a purely arithmetical criterion

for assessing its strength or weaknesses. But the figures do suggest that the Quit India Movement was a more restricted, generally less violent, shorter-lived affair in Madras than in parts of the north. If there was a climacteric to the nationalist struggle in the Madras Presidency it possibly came in 1930-3 or even in the election campaigns of 1934-7 rather than in the Quit India Movement of August 1942.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth noting that it was not in terms of moderation that the Madras government represented the provincial movement to the Government of India. Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor, went so far as to characterize the campaign as consisting of 'really violent revolutionary outbreaks' and well-organized sabotage.<sup>42</sup> He was, of course, writing when the movement in Madras was at its height, and he could not speak from any previous experience of Congress agitations. It is probable, too, that he and his advisers were influenced by the sense of crisis created by the war situation and were unprepared for even the degree of support the movement commanded. They had expected Rajagopalachari's opposition to be more of a dampener, especially in Tamilnad, and had attached excessive importance to the impression that the Congress leadership had 'little enthusiasm for a mass struggle'.<sup>43</sup> It was not the first time the moderation of Madras had been exaggerated. The governments in Madras and Delhi had similarly underestimated the party's strength on the eve of the elections to the central and provincial legislatures in 1934 and 1937.

## II

To what did Madras owe its relative moderation? What held it back from greater participation in the Quit India Movement? Some reasons for this have been suggested in the first half of this essay—the inability or unwillingness of the Congress to mobilize support over industrial wages and foodgrain prices and supplies, the absence of the Congress Socialist Party, and the opposition of the communists. But there were other reasons which range rather more elusively beyond the events of August-September 1942 and reflect upon the wider political, configuration of the Madras Presidency.

Quit India in Madras revived an old dilemma—between agitational and parliamentary or constitutional action.<sup>44</sup> It was not by any means a dilemma unique to Madras, but it had an exceptional bearing upon the politics of the south. In a variety of



guises the debate over whether to use agitational or parliamentary means 'to achieve the objectives of the Congress party had dominated nationalist politics during the 1920s and 1930s, from the adoption of Gandhi's call for a boycott of the legislatures in 1920 to the resignation of the Congress ministries in October 1939. The two paths were not mutually exclusive: Congressmen could and did shift from one to the other as political circumstances required; many accepted that the one could complement the other. But in Madras the pull of parliamentarianism was strong, the attraction of agitation correspondingly weak. In part this might be explained by the persistence of a style of political leadership which in most other parts of India was clearly on the way out by 1920. Although the old-style 'moderates' like V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar had been ejected from the Congress by that date, the party, especially though not exclusively in Tamilnad, continued to be dominated by moralizing, intellectual patrician Brahmin leaders like S. Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, A. Rangaswami Iyengar, S. Srinivasa Iyengar and S. Satyamurti, who had little real sympathy for the politics of mass agitation. Although Rajagopalachari followed Gandhi into agitational politics in 1919-20, his political style remained equally patrician and moralistic and, on becoming Premier of Madras in July 1937 he also established himself as the foremost parliamentarian in the Presidency.

A second factor, tending to reinforce this first, was the presence of a non-Brahmin (or Justice) party, which, in the absence of the Congress, took ministerial office in Madras in 1920 and held it for thirteen of the seventeen years of the dyarchy constitution. The existence of a viable parliamentary alternative to the Congress deeply perturbed provincial Congressmen: the Justice Party was represented as both 'loyalist' (in the support it gave to the British and in its opposition to the Congress) and 'communalist' (in its demands for greater non-Brahmin representation in government service and public life). The Justice Party could not be ignored, nor could the wider non-Brahmin movement of which it was a part. But Congressmen were divided as to how they should respond, whether by openly challenging the Justices in the legislature (the frontal assault favoured by the Swarajists) or by the more circuitous route of creating a mass agitational movement and a broad-based political party (the 'Gandhian' strategy pursued by Rajagopalachari). In 1934-7 the two courses converged. Using the strength and the political prestige acquired through agitation, the Congress defeated the increasingly factionalized Justices in a series of elections to the local boards and legislatures. But the need to complete the task by the Congress itself taking office was

again demonstrated by the appointment of an essentially non-Brahmin Interim Ministry until the national Congress leadership finally approved office-acceptance in July 1937. Moreover, in order to defeat the Justice Party at the local and provincial elections the Congress had opened its doors to almost all possible elements (including ex-Justicites). In becoming a broad coalition of castes and classes the party further committed itself to parliamentary action and aligned itself more firmly with the propertied classes. While agitational action kept open the possibility of mass participation and pressure for radical change, parliamentarianism represented a commitment to a non-revolutionary transfer of power and a gradualist-reformist approach to India's problems.

But the Congress in Madras had peaked too soon. Rajagopalachari and his ministerial colleagues anticipated that a relatively smooth and rapid transfer of power would follow, probably without recourse to a further round of civil disobedience. The decision to resign from office in October 1939 was reluctantly complied with, as was the individual satyagraha at the close of 1940, for which Gandhi, who had not disguised his doubts about the performance of the provincial ministries, pointedly selected the erstwhile ministers and leading parliamentarians like Satyamurti. Barely were they released from prison in 1941 than they began to canvass for a new Congress ministry in Madras.<sup>45</sup> Small wonder, then, that the government could detect among them no enthusiasm for a renewed satyagraha.

Rajagopalachari's own position in 1941-2 was a complex amalgam of personal ambition and frustration with what he saw as the overriding needs of the province and the nation. To his critics and detractors he was a power-hungry Brahmin scheming his way back to the Premiership he had so enjoyed.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that in speaking out in favour of the acceptance of the Cripps offer in early 1942 and the formation of some kind of national government, he overestimated his influence both over the party in Madras and with the Congress High Command. But he was rather more than the lone voice he is often represented as being during these 'wilderness years'. His anxiety that the Congress should, if possible, return to office in the provinces and form part of a national government at the centre gave expression to the strength of the parliamentary principle in Madras and to the ever-present fear that if the Congress did not exercise constitutional power it would be misused by 'reactionaries'. From the standpoint of the southern presidency in early 1942, with an invasion seemingly imminent, the constitutional imperative seemed paramount,

though it might be added that by July and August 1942, with Madras still unscathed, Rajagopalachari's position was weakening. His willingness to accommodate Jinnah's demands, even to the point of accepting the idea of Pakistan, was too extreme for many southern Congressmen, but it reflected his belief in the urgent need for a national government that would replace the British and provide effective defence against Japan. The time for *satyagrahas*, he believed, had passed. The Congress was now a party of government: in that lay its strength and its opportunity.<sup>47</sup> When Quit India erupted, Rajagopalachari, the man who had led the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience campaigns in Tamilnad in previous decades, was quick to denounce it as 'hooliganism', a 'grievous mistake' that had unleashed 'nothing but pure violence'.<sup>48</sup> The bitterness of Rajagopalachari's words reflect not only his personal alienation from the Congress, but also the extent to which a substantial section of middle-class nationalist opinion, especially in Tamilnad, was out of sympathy, out of phase, with the Quit India movement. From their viewpoint Quit India was more hiatus than climacteric.

While the Quit India Movement in Madras proved to be a less momentous event than in the north, loyalty to the Congress at that juncture became a critical test of political allegiance and party respectability even in the south. Rajagopalachari's stature as a Congress leader never fully recovered from his Quit India defection. For those who opposed or despised him it was an almost heaven-sent opportunity to discredit his leadership and question his political wisdom and integrity. Telugu Congressmen, resentful of his domineering attitude towards them during the 1937-9 ministry and angry at his refusal to countenance their proposals for a separate Andhra province, were quick to denounce him at the time and keen to keep alive the remembrance of his 'betrayal' once the War was over. In Tamilnad, too, Rajagopalachari's wartime ostracism from the Congress enabled Kamaraj and his associates to consolidate their control over the party machine. In most provinces, the Congress ministries which took office in March 1946 had virtually the same composition as those that had resigned in October 1939. But not in Madras. Rajagopalachari's opposition to Quit India was used to keep him out of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and out of the ministry. First T. Prakasam, Rajagopalachari's principal Telugu adversary, and then Kamaraj's nominees took over as Chief Ministers. Ironically, however, there was still a place for Rajagopalachari's patrician style. In a polyglot province, with the constituent Congress parties themselves divided along factional lines, Rajagopalachari re-

mained the only man likely to hold a provincial ministry together, and he returned as Chief Minister in 1952. But the formation of Andhra in 1953, and the dismemberment of the old Madras province finally in 1954 entrusted power to a regional boss like Kamaraj, whose homely, home-spun, populist political style was far removed from that of his Brahmin antagonist.<sup>49</sup>

Rajagopalachari's defection over Quit India was significant in another sense too. For much of his political career he had benefitted from being 'Gandhi's man', enjoying the trust and the support of the national Congress leadership. In 1942 he tried, in vain as it happened, to reverse this relationship, speaking for a southern constituency, seeking to use his regional power base to influence the party High Command. Perhaps Rajagopalachari had taken to heart the strength of popular feeling against the 'imposition' of Hindi on the south though he certainly opposed it strenuously enough at the time. Significantly, too, in seeking to conciliate Jinnah by agreeing to the idea of Pakistan, Rajagopalachari was also responding to the more immediate challenge of Tamil separatism and E. V. Ramaswami Naicker's call for the creation of a Dravidian state. No one in the north, Jinnah included, took Ramaswami Naicker's 'three nation theory' very seriously, but, following the anti-Hindi agitation and the consequent revival of the Justice Party and Self-Respect Movement, it was a further indication of how great the rift had become between north and south especially the Tamilian south.<sup>50</sup> Rajagopalachari's stand on Quit India was, however paradoxically, an expression of his identification with the south against the north. The irony in this is that when the war was over, Rajagopalachari again became 'Gandhi's man' and Gandhi and the High Command campaigned vigorously to have their prodigal son reinstated in Madras. But now it was Kamaraj who took the southerners' part and successfully defied the attempt to 'impose' Rajagopalachari on the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and the provincial ministry.<sup>51</sup> Seen in this perspective, Rajagopalachari's stand on Quit India, like the anti-Hindi agitation in 1938-9, like the rejection of Rajagopalachari himself in 1945-6, was part of a southern revolt against the Congress of Gandhi, Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel.

Ramaswami Naicker and the Self-Respect Movement also highlight another peculiar feature of the Madras political landscape in the early 1940s. In Maharashtra the non-Brahmins who entered the Congress during the late 1920s and 1930s brought with them a social and political radicalism which helped transform the political disposition as well as the social composition of the regional Congress party.<sup>52</sup> The Satara alternative government or

*prati sarkar*, described in this volume by Gail Omvedt, was one outcome of this non-Brahmin radical tradition. In Madras, there was no Satara because there was no equivalent non-Brahmin radicalism to issue forth from the Congress in 1942-3. Ramaswami Naicker represented a kind of maverick radicalism of his own—part atheist, part socialist, part Tamil nativist—that could never be squared with either the *zamindars*, bankers and high-caste Hindus of the Justice Party or the nationalism and the lingering Brahmin leadership of the Congress in Madras. That the non-Brahmin and Self-Respect movements influenced the Congress, especially in Tamilnad, is not in doubt: they gave encouragement to the non-Brahmin element within the party and aided the rise of Kamaraj and other lower-caste non-Brahmins. But Ramaswami Naicker remained too much of an individualist to create a viable political party of his own to challenge the Congress—a task taken up by the offshoot Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam only after the War—or to inject a non-Brahmin radicalism into the regional Congress party. Rajagopalachari's rift with the Congress over Quit India enabled a breach to be made in the old patrician, Brahminical style of Congress leadership in Madras. But what replaced it was not a dynamic non-Brahmin radicalism, but a more vernacular, populist version of the old parliamentary tradition. Perhaps it was appropriate that Kamaraj's political guru was not Ramaswami Naicker but Satyamurti, a Brahmin and one of the most dedicated parliamentarians the Madras Presidency had ever produced.

### Notes

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2. F. G. Hutchins, *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 235. See also A. C. Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement: The Second World War and Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi, 1975), p. 222.
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27. V. K. Narasimhan, *Kamaraj : A Study* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 26—9 ; Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, p. 324.
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30. FR 1 Aug. 1942 ; FR 2 Aug. 1942 ; FR 1 Sept. 1942 ; FR 2 Jan. 1942 ; FR 2 Feb. 1943 ; Hope to Linlithgow, 9 Sept. 1942, *Transfer of Power*, II, p. 983 ; B.S. Baliga, *Madras District Gazetteers : South Arcot* (Madras, 1962), p. 111 ; Bhuyan, *Quit India*, p. 84 ; interview with K. Diraviam, IAS, Madras, 9 Feb. 1970.
31. R. L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad : The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 207—8.
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35. See the Madras FRs for this period.
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48. Linlithgow to Amery, 15 Aug. 1942, *Transfer of Power*, II, p. 709 ; Rajagopalachari to Amrit Kaur, 25 Sept. 1942, in Chopra, *Quit India Movement*, p. 283.
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# THE SATARA PRATI SARKAR

GAIL OMVEDT

*Nana Patil:* I don't know how the activity I and my co-workers have done in Satara district fits in (with) your philosophy of truth and non-violence. But in doing our work we tried to implement your principles as far as it was possible. We wrecked trains but we didn't wreck a single passenger train. But we broke the hand that was responsible for a murder, a rape, or a robbery; we also beat police informers. But if we hadn't done that we wouldn't have been able to do anything. We wouldn't have been able to organize a movement. The advice you gave us in August 1942 to 'do or die', and the advice you gave us that if national leaders are jailed then every Indian should consider himself to be independent and organize a movement to throw out the English according to his own understanding, was what we followed. We fought the English through the guerrilla methods of Shivaji Maharaj.

*Gandhi:* Nana Patil, whether your movement fits in (with) my philosophy or not is not so important as the fact that you kept the 1942 freedom movement alive, and Satara has defended the name of that movement. I am one of those who feel that the violence of the brave is better than the non-violence of the cowardly!

(A reported encounter between Gandhi and Nana Patil, May-June 1944):<sup>1</sup>

**In 1942 the 'August Revolution' exploded all over India following the arrest of all top Congress leaders on 9 August. Inspired by the**



'Quit India' resolution passed by the All India Congress Committee (AICC) at Bombay, millions of ordinary peasants, workers, students, middle class professionals, artisans and employees took part in marches, demonstrations, clashes with the police, sabotage and various other forms of underground activity in the fervent belief that the final battle of the freedom struggle had come. This time they fought not only with the idea that they were free to use all means, including violent ones, but also that in some form or another they would take their future in their own hands and set up their own government. The mass uprising, essentially leaderless, was crushed in a couple of months by British military power at the national level. But sabotage and other guerrilla activity continued strongly for about a year and sporadically after that, and some forms of locally based underground activity went on until independence seemed a settled fact and elections were declared in 1946.

Western Maharashtra as a whole was characterized by a widespread and high level of guerrilla activity and insurrection in 1942 and early 1943, though it was not quite as violent as Bihar.<sup>2</sup> But in Satara district something further developed: the underground activity was prolonged and a parallel government or *prati sarkar* was set up and continued to function until 1946 in spite of British repression and the indifference of the Congress leadership. Its activities included peoples' courts or *nyayadan mandals* as well as various types of armed activities and constructive programmes. The major activists of the movement eluded arrest entirely until 1944, when a few turned themselves in on the advice of Gandhi, and a few others were captured. But others replaced them and the majority were never caught. The *prati sarkar*, in fact, had begun to function effectively at a time when such movements elsewhere in India were being suppressed, and continued to flourish until independence. Its last armed encounter with the police (resulting in two deaths) took place after the naval mutiny in 1946.

The 1942 movement signalled the end of British rule by making it crystal clear that the imperialists did not have sufficient force to govern the country in the face of the increasingly powerful and organized opposition. Yet while a few books in English exist and articles on local revolts are beginning to appear, little of this movement has been seriously studied.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the movement was not only a challenge to the British but also remained an embarrassment to the party which inherited their power, not simply because its upsurge contradicted the ideology of non-violence, but even more because it had its base among particular classes and political forces which were beginning to

articulate themselves as demanding a different kind of independence, a 'worker-peasant' state. The case of Satara resulted in the paradox that the main Maratha leaders of the Congress were forced to try to *claim* the movement as their heritage while most of the actual leaders of the movement remained in permanent opposition. Political conditions have thus hardly been favourable for detailed scholarship. The important questions—how did this movement take place ? why in Satara district in particular ? what was its significance for the development of political power and social structure in western Maharashtra ?—remain to be answered. This essay is an initial attempt to formulate some of these answers.

### *Satara District*

The Satara of 1942 (which includes present-day Satara and most of present-day Sangli district) has been a Maratha political centre from early times. From the time of Shivaji through the non-Brahman movement of the early twentieth century, the nationalist movement in the 1930s and '40s, to the Samyukta Maharashtra movement and the nearly unchallenged dominance of the Congress party in Maharashtra, it has kept this centrality. It has seemed a typically 'peasant' district, lacking both the overtones of Brahman hegemony that still remain in Pune to the north or the more 'feudal' remnants in the one-time princely state of Kolhapur to the south. Today, though, many of these peasants have become capitalist farmers, and waving fields of green sugarcane, cooperative sugar factories, educational institutions, dairy and irrigation societies make this a central area of Maharashtra's 'sugar barons', one that has fostered the major political leaders of the state. Y.B. Chavan (Congress leader, Chief Minister of Maharashtra and a leading minister in the Central Government, died in 1984), Vasantdada Patil (Congress leader and former Chief Minister), Rajarambapu Patil (former Congress leader and Minister, President of the state unit of the Janata Party until his death in 1984), N. D. Patil (leader of the Peasants' and Workers' Party).

Satara passed under British control in 1850-51 and was described as follows in the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency :

The subdivisions of Satara, Tasgaon, Karad, Valva, Jalvi and Wai, nearest to the Sahyadris, were the most favoured in soil and climate, the richest, best tilled and most populous. They were watered by numerous streams and fed by abundant and

seasonable rain. They were crossed by lofty mountains whose steep sides were often clothed with crops, while their tops were crowned with fields and villages. In these subdivisions much of the land was alienated on rent-free or service tenure. Of what remained and was assessable, the largest part was *miras*, that is held by hereditary owners who could not be ousted so long as they paid the government rental. The commonness of this favourable tenure kept the west of the district in the highest cultivation....The landholders, most of whom were Kunbis, were hardworking and skilful husbandmen. They understood the rotation of crops, the value of manures, and the necessity of refreshing some soils by fallows. Individual holdings were small....<sup>4</sup>

These central and western *talukas* on the black soil valleys of the Krishna river and its tributaries, flanked by the Sahyadris, are characterized by very large villages, many of them with a population of four to five thousand even in the nineteenth century and over 10,000 today. The main peasant foodcrop was *jawari*, but commercial crops such as sugarcane, tobacco and chilli which are central to the economy today, were grown even in 1850, while mango groves, cotton and teak forests were also found. These *talukas* along with the mainly mountainous Patan and Shiralapeth, then a part of Valva, were the centre of the 1942 movement. The drier eastern *talukas* of Khanapur, Khatav and Koregaon were also involved, but less prominently. The *prati sarkar* barely touched the part of Satara district north of Satara town.

In caste terms, the district was dominated by Kunbis (Maratha Kunbis) who constituted 56% of its population in the 1930 census. Satara district, more than any other, had a concentration of this famous 'peasant warrior' caste. The British viewed them on the one hand as uncultured freebooters ('wild and predatory Mahrattas') who represented a danger to the empire, and on the other as prosperous peasants who were its economic base. The early *East-India Gazetteer* was candid in its racist expression of this ambivalence :

The Mahratta military chiefs are generally coarse, ignorant and rapacious, and so much resemble their common soldiers that they might change place without much striking the observation of a European. Of all these classes, however, we see only the worst specimens; and were they again reduced ....to a state of freebooting desperation, they might become the most dangerous opponents that Asia could produce

against the valour and discipline of Europe. The **Mahratta** peasantry still have a pride in the former triumph of their nation and retain some ambition to partake in military exploits, but...their present habits are frugal, sober and industrious.<sup>5</sup>

Almost all those who now call themselves 'Marathas' were described as 'Kunbis' in the early Gazetteers, but then, as now, a distinction was drawn among the various clans or *bhaukis*, placing some as aristocratic or *shahannavkuli* Marathas and some as commoner Kunbis. But the division was open to some argument; intermarriage was possible between the two sections, and most of the *shahannavkuli* families as well as the 'common' Kunbis were basically peasant cultivators sharing a militaristic tradition. Aspects of this 'militarism' included ongoing family feuds, which arose over disputes about land or social rank and was often carried on for generations; tradition has it that if a man was murdered a child from his family would be selected, raised, fed and trained solely for the purpose of avenging the murder. The District Gazetteer itself referred to Kasegaon, one of the villages in the district which was later an important centre of rebellion, by saying that 'the inhabitants have an unenviable character for crime and litigiousness, mischief to crops, cattle-poisoning and arson having been frequent for many years';<sup>6</sup> and dacoity was prominent in the hilly areas of Valva and Shiralapeth *talukas*.

Other non-Brahman castes, including the Dhangara (shepherds), artisan castes and even the untouchables shared this general 'Maratha' culture. Among the untouchables, the Mahars were bound to perform forced service for the village and its various feudal overlords, but were free of the kind of abject slavery imposed on untouchables in states such as Tamilnadu and Kerala. This caste was to provide the social base for the most militant *dalit* movement in modern India, led by Dr. Ambedkar. Their hereditary rivals, the Mangs (or Matangs), were even more renowned for toughness and lawlessness, and along with the low-caste Ramoshis (classed as a 'criminal tribe') were considered almost a synonym for banditti.

Although the *Bombay Gazetteer* characterizes the area as *ryotwari* with small holdings predominating, there was in fact a good deal of landlordism. On the one hand there were the various forms of land alienation noted in the *Gazetteer*, with *inams* having been given for various kinds of military or priestly service. By the time of British conquest, after two centuries of Peshwa rule, much of this was held by Brahmans. Maratha feudalists survived and

Kolhapur and a couple of smaller states (and Satara itself until 1850) were ruled by Maratha chiefs, but two other big princely states (Miraj and Sangli) and some smaller ones were Brahman-ruled and numerous Brahman *inams* dotted the area. Along with this, as Perlin has shown, by late Peshwa times the *ryotwari* reality was being undermined by the fact that Maratha and Brahman feudalists used the *watan* privileges that were a part of the village structure to build an economic base of landlordism, by buying up various kinds of *patilki*, *deshmukhi* or *inam* rights often spread over many villages to be managed under one huge landlord household.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this, the trade growing out of the rich agriculture of the region was controlled by merchants at the lower level (local Vanis, southern Jain Vanis, Telis and others) and, higher up, by Brahman bankers.

Thus the social structure of the district can be described as one of caste-feudalism. Feudal rulers and landlords (mainly Brahmans and aristocratic Marathas) were at the top, followed by the merchants and the priests and administrators who backed up their power. This feudal structure entered the village level itself and included local *inam* holders, and often the family or clan of the village *patils*, as well as the Brahman accountants and priests. The exploited toilers were not simply an undifferentiated 'peasant' (or peasant and artisan) class, but were also divided by caste into three broad sections of cultivating peasants, artisans and untouchable field labourers. While many of the artisans and untouchables were classed as *balutedars* who were considered to have a right to the share of the harvest due to the work they performed, they were not considered to have any rights in the land itself. The majority community, the Kunbi-Marathas were themselves divided into lineages with different ranks and degrees of rights in the land, and the highest section among them could aspire to and attain a share of feudal exploiting sections even before the British conquest, and the division between *bahujan samaj* and *shetji-bhatji*—which became the central theme of the later non-Brahman movement—had its roots in this earlier period.

### *From the Non-Brahman Movement to Nationalism*

On this rich, turbulent territory British rule was imposed. Between 1850 and 1942 heavy impositions of land revenue and the ravages of a commercialized colonial economy brought sporadic famines, widespread peasant indebtedness and partial alienation of land to those who benefited from their positions in the bureaucracy. Two aspects of this colonial impact helped to consolidate a Brahman-moneylender-landlord dominance in the area.

First, though western Maharashtra is thought of as a classic *ryotwari* settlement area, not only were major princely states left untouched in the south, but the *inams* were also left intact, and while *inamdars* (mostly Brahmans) were not given rights as 'landlords', the revenues they retained and the land they directly kept gave them significant power. Such *inam* holdings represented 20 per cent of the British district of Satara.

Second, as the new bureaucracy replaced the old feudal power, with the *kulkarni* its lowest linch-pin in the villages, access to this bureaucracy was channelled through the new education system, and this in turn was heavily dominated by Brahmans. With the increase in trade, merchants (now including also Marwaris and some Brahmans) gained in power; and with private ownership regulated by British courts, lands began to pass into the hands of Brahmans and merchants, either directly or indirectly in the form of mortgage. Backed by colonial rule and within the *ryotwari* structure, a commercialized but consolidated landlordism developed in the district which included some of the former Maratha feudatories and the top families of *patil* lineages in the central villages, but which was still heavily dominated by Brahmans and merchant castes.

The limited statistics that are available will substantiate these generalizations. First, a few village surveys conducted by settlement officials in the mid-1920s showed substantial landlordism as well as hired labour especially in the villages of the Krishna valley plains (see Table 1). Census figures are tricky since 'tenant cultivators' were not really recognized in Deccan's *ryotwari* areas; that is, there were no protected occupancy tenants of the kind that had evolved in the *zamindari* areas and thus no official noting of their existence. Thus those classed as 'cultivating owners' contained some actual landlords, while those classed as 'agricultural labourers' included many small owners unable to live on their own lands as well as others who had lost their lands through sale or mortgage and were working as labourers or unrecognized tenants. It is against this background that we must assess the 1931 census figures which show that of all male principal earners in cultivation in Satara district, 1.1% were non-cultivating landlords, only 15.1% were 'cultivating owners', only 1.8% were 'tenant cultivators' but a huge 82.0% were classed as 'agricultural labourers'! (It has to be remembered also that according to 1926 figures Satara had only an estimated 0.2% of landless males in cultivation and a higher than normal percentage of small landholdings)<sup>8</sup>.

Table 2 shows something of the caste composition of agrarian

TABLE—1

*Tenancy and Hired Labour in Satara, 1926*

<i>Taluka</i>	Village and Description	Per cent land cultivated by tenants	Per cent cultivated with hired labour
Karad	Khudshi : 2 miles from Karad, near roads	46.7	94.4
	Salshirambe : 15 miles from Karad, bad communications	25.2	100.0
Satara	Vadha : 4 miles from Satara, easy communications	73.5	6.9
	Borgaon : 9 miles from Satara	36.6	69.9
	Badgaon : foothill village, remote	16.9	54.6
	Thoseghar : hilltop village, most difficult of access	10.2	—
Valva	Kapuskhed : 3 miles from Islampur town	46.6	5.6
	Dhalvi : distant, reachable only by bullock cart	43.4	5.2
Shiralapeth	Khed : largest village near Shirala, metalled road	40.3	40.5
	Korivde : prosperous village in small valley, foothills	13.2	—
	Konhole : hill village	13.3	3.2

*Source* : H. D. Baskerville, 'Papers Relating to the Second Revision Settlement of Satara Taluka, July 1923' ; C. H. Bristow, 'Papers Relating to the Second Revision Settlement of Karad Taluka, January 1925' and 'Papers Relating to the Second Revision Settlement of Valva Taluka, February 1925' (Bombay, Govt. Central Press, 1929).

classes. In spite of the limitations of the data, it does give some indication of actual Brahman dominance among the 'rent receivers' or landlords. As for Brahman dominance in the bureaucracy and education, this is fairly well established. In 1922 Brahmans, who were about 3% of the population, made up 67.8% of all school students in Satara district, while Marathas and other middle castes, about 60% of total population, accounted for only 10%. By 1930, after two decades of intensive anti-Brahman campaign and educational reform efforts, Brahmans still contributed 128 of 219 clerks in the revenue department, while Marathas and allied castes contributed only 53.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Satara, once a centre of Maratha power and still characterized by an underlying peasant militancy, was like other parts of Maharashtra, subordinated to Brahman-merchant dominance under colonial rule. The general subordination of the non-Brahman peasants and artisans, and the fact that many of them (including people from supposedly aristocratic Maratha families) were working not only as peasants and tenants but also as hired labourers was enough to define them as a *bahujan samaj* (majority community), oppressed and exploited by a class which combined landlordism, moneylending and bureaucratic power with high caste status.

This was the background of the fact that the first mass social movement in Maharashtra, the non-Brahman movement, was directed at local exploiters defined in caste terms rather than at the British power. This movement was in essence a revolt at both cultural and economic levels against feudal caste domination, and it found a major centre in Satara district. Jotiba Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj spread to the district soon after its foundation in 1873, but it was in the twentieth century that the movement advanced rapidly. When Shahu Chhatrapati, the ruler of nearby Kolhapur state and a descendent of Shivaji, became a fervent advocate of anti-Brahmanism as a result of Brahman refusal to ratify his Kshatriya status, he began to sponsor Satyashodhak activities. Many of the first generation of educated non-Brahmans found service in his state, and he provided financial patronage for both the non-Brahman Party (founded in 1917) and Satyashodhak educational activities.

It was in Satara district that the class thrust of the Satyashodhak movement became clear with a major peasant revolt in 1919-21. At this time a series of Satyashodhak *jalsas*, singing and drama troupes organized on the model of the traditional, bawdy, peasant *tamasha*, began to move through the district. These provoked widespread peasant uprisings that included on the one hand



Table—2

*Agricultural Occupations of Selected Castes, 1911*

Caste	% Rent Receivers	% Cultivators	% Field Labourers
Chitpavan Brahman	20.5	25.6	—
Deshastha Brahman	20.8	23.1	—
Sonar	—	29.2	—
Maratha	1.7	63.8	22.7
Kunbi	—	61.6	29.3
Dhobi (Washerman)	—	38.0	—
Kumbhar (Potter)	—	31.0	15.0
Mali	—	54.9	29.1
Sutar (Carpenter)	—	25.6	12.5
Mahar	—	46.1	30.9
Teli (Oil Presser)	—	36.0	25.3
Dhangar (Shepherd)	—	39.8	33.8
Nhavi (Barber)	—	26.8	26.1
Koshti (Weaver)	—	4.7	—
Ramoshi	—	36.7	34.9
Chambhar (Shoemaker)	—	—	24.2
Lohar (Ironsmith)	—	—	16.9
Mang(Ropemaker)	—	12.1	52.8

*Source :Census of India, 1911, Vol. VIII, Pt.1, Bombay Report (Bombay, Govt. Central Press, 1912), Subsidiary Table VIII, pp. 337-45.*

disruption of Brahman religious ceremonies, deliberate 'pollution' of wells and breaking of idols, and on the other the looting of grain, the burning of equipment and buildings of Brahman landlords, and widespread, sporadic rent strikes. The District Collector commented as follows :

I am far from denying that crimes have been committed against Brahmans, but experience gained in the enquiries shows that acts of violence have been committed against them not as Brahmans but as unpopular landlords or moneylenders, and that Brahmans in a village against whom no grievance has been felt have generally been allowed to

live in peace.... A movement is now developing not to pay more than half the gross produce as rent rather than the 2/3 or 3/4 as has been the custom hitherto. Most of the non-cultivating landlords being Brahmans, they believe that the movement and the subsequent boycott of their lands is ... directed against them as a class.<sup>10</sup>

Strikingly, this peasant uprising occurred in most of the same *talukas* that were to be central in the 1942 movement: Tasgaon, Valva, Karad, Khanapur, Koregaon and to a lesser extent in Patan and Satara. This suggests the question: what was the connection between the non-Brahman Satyashodhak movement and the later nationalist uprising? It is usually assumed either that there was no real connection or that the two were antagonistic to each other as movements. In fact, up to 1930 the two movements were subjectively antagonistic, with non-Brahman leaders and mainly Brahman Congressmen looking on each other with suspicion and hostility. Yet in crucial ways it was the non-Brahman movement that laid the ground for Satara's *prati sarkar*. Its contribution lay in fostering a new, equalitarian and rationalistic political-social consciousness among the masses and in the degree of solidarity created among the *bahujan samaj* in the course of the anti-feudal, anti-caste struggles.

The caste ideology that legitimized the authority of the dominant classes was attacked with vigour. This meant not only an attack on Brahmanism but also strong efforts to reform and rationalize existing customs among the peasantry. The theme of the peasant resurgence in Satara was the equalitarian and rationalistic ideology of Phule: that the caste system (and the gods and goddesses that backed it up) was not divinely ordained but a historical human creation that had to be destroyed; science, equality and education were the themes of the modern age. As a biographer of Nana Patil puts it,

Such a revolutionary change came over the lower classes that a (new) power of thought was kindled among them... Those who through debate and practice raised among the innumerable lower class majority the questions of who and what was the cause of injustice, what were the people's rights, how injustice was to be overthrown—these were the Satyasamajists!<sup>11</sup>

Educational institutions, a central thrust of the movement, were a major medium in spreading this awakening. Hostels and colleges

founded by Shahu Maharaj in Kolhapur and by Bhaurao Patil's Ryot Shikshan Sanstha in Satara trained numerous youth from peasant, artisan and even untouchable backgrounds. By 1930 these new students and teachers were turning nationalist, and in contrast to the Brahman or other upper caste teachers they had deep roots and support in the villages in which they worked. Students or young peasants educated to the sixth or seventh standard provided the bulk of the underground activists in 1942, and teachers were often so central as sympathizers or activists that one of the most famous novels of the period, by the Matang writer Annabhau Sathe, is titled simply *Master*.

These educated youth could claim to represent the *bahujan samaj* as a whole. What was this *bahujan samaj*? It included a wide range of people, from landless and still semi-bound *dalit* labourers, struggling artisans and factory workers to rich peasants and a growing educated middle class. It may be said that the rich peasant section was beginning to emerge as a force by this time, taking advantage of the fight against Brahman and Marwari moneylender-landlords, basing itself on the beginnings of co-operation and the spread of iron ploughs and other improved implements sold in the district from the 1920s by businessmen such as Cooper and Kirloskar, and organizing politically through the Non-Brahman Party to fight for control of school boards and district local boards. But as yet it had not become a consolidated exploiting class in power, its interests still lay with the rest in the fight against feudal power and colonial state. In this context, the social radicalism that was part of the non-Brahman movement in Satara, which also provided the ideology for this rising class, helped to create broad ties of solidarity and (in the broad sense) a kind of class consciousness in the area.

It is true that the non-Brahman movement was anti-nationalist in the beginning, but it was inevitable that the *bahujan samaj* should become nationalist as they recognized the nature of their colonial enemy. By building up solidarity and strength in the process of struggle against feudalism and the caste system, by stimulating a widespread equalitarian and rationalist consciousness, and by building up a leadership from among the masses, the Satyashodhak movement in fact laid the basis for a deeper and stronger national movement than would be found in most parts of India once the non-Brahman consciousness turned nationalist.

This shift to a nationalist position began in the 1920s when young and militant leaders such as Jedhe and Jawalkar began to express sympathy with the nationalist agitation and organized opposition to the elite, pro-British non-Brahman leaders. In the

1930s it was they who provided the leadership to draw the masses of the Maharashtrian peasantry—via the contacts of the non-Brahman movement—into the Congress-led nationalist movement. Changes in the Congress movement itself helped this process, the fact that a new leadership was coming forward and new programmes of importance to workers and peasants were being taken up. Gandhi himself became an important symbol because—unlike in Tamilnadu where he became associated with Brahmans and 'north Indian' dominance—in Maharashtra he and his followers represented a new and social reform-oriented group that was in opposition to the old orthodox section which had sworn by Lokmanya Tilak. The younger, socialist-oriented Brahman Congressmen could also appeal to non-Brahman leaders like Jedhe.

At the same time, the *swadeshi* agitation was beginning to gain popularity among Bombay textile workers, and many of them participated in the *satyagraha* of 1930-31. One who died after being run over by a truck that a group of *satyagrahis* was trying to obstruct, Babu Genu, was memorialized in nationalist songs and legends as a martyr. Such activity was to have an impact on districts like Satara which provided large numbers of workers for the Bombay mills. The salt *satyagraha* was symbolically important. But it was the jungle *satyagraha* of 1932 which was one of the first campaigns to involve peasant interests in a direct way. It met with a big response in Shiralapeth *talukā*, where two demonstrators were killed in police firing at Bilashi in the Sahyadri hills. This area was to become an important centre of the *prati sarkar*, and generated the only group whose leadership was Gandhian.

But it was Nana Patil who really has to be called the decisive creator of peasant nationalism in Satara, and his main area of operation was not the hills, but the Krishna valley and eastern region. A young man of middle peasant background from Valva *taluka* educated upto the sixth standard, he had been employed as a *talathi* but had spent most of his time campaigning for social reform under the influence of the Satyashodhak movement. In 1932 he resigned his service to throw himself into political work. He wandered through the villages, holding meetings everywhere without regard for British police power (later activists said of this period that 'he was the first to go underground') and putting forward an ideology of peasant nationalism. The misery of peasants, he argued, including their subjugation to *sawkars* and *bhatjis*, was due to their exploitation by imperialism which took their agricultural products at low prices as raw materials and sent back English manufactured goods to drive out Indian products.

The linchpin of exploitation was thus British rule. Significantly, this was accompanied by reference to Jotiba Phule, for example to his appearance before a ceremonial British gathering dressed only in a loincloth to symbolize the poverty of the peasants under the British raj. Nana Patil was thus putting forward a combination of the Satyashodhak and nationalist traditions, and taking this systematically to the rural areas for the first time in Maharashtra.

In 1934 he was called to Kundal, a village in Aundh state (whose ruler was a nationalist who gave support to anti-British propaganda and action) by Appasaheb Lad, a young Maratha, the first matric of the village who had studied in the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapith, a school for 'national education' in Pune. There Nana spent several years organizing a full-scale programme that included propaganda against the British, moneylenders and landlords; *swadeshi* and boycott of foreign goods; anti-untouchability campaigns; agitation against alcohol and *ganja*; and inexpensive, non-religious and often collective weddings which were Satyashodhak in inspiration (they took place without Brahman priests) but which he called 'Gandhi marriages'. This all-round programme, coupled with his daring and constant readiness either to go to jail or go underground, and expressed in a powerful, robust peasant vernacular, gave Nana Patil an unparalleled image in the district. But his relations with the Congress party hierarchy remained tense and tenuous. His biographers describe a telling incident when, released from jail on parole in 1932, he was refused help for food by Congress leaders in the *taluka* town of Islampur and told he could work as a *hamal*.<sup>12</sup> In fact he seemed to have almost no contacts with district or provincial Congress leaders either during this period or during the 1942 movement itself.

Thus the Satara *bahujan samaj* was becoming nationalist in a peculiar way. They were taking the name of Gandhi as a symbol but without becoming Gandhians in any ideological sense. Not only were there few systematic ties with the Congress party hierarchy (except in the case of the Shiralapeth group), there were also none with Left parties: there was little socialist or Communist presence in Satara and none among the *bahujan samaj*. There was no organized Kisan Sabha in the district—or for that matter in Maharashtra as a whole, the famous case of the Warlis being notably removed from the mainstream of Maharashtrian peasant life—though there were many scattered peasant rallies held in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the 'Maratha wave' or 'peasant wave' that now came into the national movement came with few organizational affiliations, to either give it clear leadership from above or to discipline and shackle its actions.

***The Founding of the Prati Sarkar: August 1942 to June 1943***

9 August : Only hours after the All-India Congress Committee session had passed its famous 'Quit India' resolution, the colonial state swooped down on the major leaders of the national movement. But the removal of the first-rank leaders only served to unleash the biggest mass uprising seen in India.

The marches, attacks, sabotage and sporadic underground activity that followed have been called a 'spontaneous revolution'. But it was also a revolution that with all its violence, was in many ways initiated if not led by Gandhi himself. For in the year prior to August 1942, Gandhi had not only made specific statements justifying violence in the use of self-defence against potential Japanese aggression, but also gradually began to express his moral condemnation of British rule in a way that hinted such methods might be used against it. The mass mood was increasingly militant, the pressure from the Left for a truly radical movement beginning to mount, and gradually Gandhi began to prepare for a *satyagraha* campaign that all the Congress ranks were led to believe would be the biggest yet—an 'open rebellion' in which every known technique and some new ones would be used. Boycott of all government agencies, non-payment of revenue, collective civil disobedience, non-violent incitement of government bureaucratic and military personnel to resign, the 'peaceful' disruption of communications, and establishment of parallel governments were all mentioned, though no authoritative programme was given.<sup>13</sup>

The arrests removed any possible leadership for such a mass campaign. But what was remembered well by an aroused people (including the Satara underground) were basically two points: *karengē ya marengē*, and 'let everyone be his own leader'. And these were sufficient. The result was that the Satara underground activists not only acted in the name of Gandhi but continue to claim up to the present that they were in fact following the 'Gandhi path' as they cut wires, robbed trains, snatched rifles, engaged in gun battles with police and dacoits, beat those judged guilty in peoples' courts and refused in 1944 to follow Gandhi's own expressed wish that they surrender.

It is significant that action in Satara began later than the immediate outbursts in the cities and in north India. This indicates that the crucial sections of the masses who were ready to move were waiting for a clear programme and a signal from the leadership—or perhaps for the development of a leadership. Appasaheb Lad writes that while people read of the destruction of British power in Bihar, their immediate response was: 'Though the government no longer exists the people's day-to-day problems

have not been lessened. Though the government courts have disappeared the problems that brought people to the courts have not lessened. Though they have brought down the police, the traditional criminals have not been abolished from the world'.<sup>14</sup> It is dangerous to take reminiscences written years later as accurate depictions of the consciousness of the time: nevertheless the course of events as well as the testimony of activists indicates that some ideas of building an alternate power were there from the beginning, though they were brought into action only as activists at the village level responded to the dilemmas and pressures brought on by the needs of the movement. This process can be seen in the way the movement developed from open mass actions, to underground sabotage, to the peoples' courts themselves.

After the arrests of the top Congress leaders, the remaining Satara delegates met in Bombay—these included Y. B. Chavan, RamanandSwami, Vitthalrao Page and Vasantdada Patil—and then returned to Satara and held a two-day meeting at Karad. Some of these had established contact with the socialist underground. The Karad meeting decided to form two organizations, an underground group and an open *satyagraha* group.<sup>15</sup> But this organization at the beginning does not appear to be the organization that created the *prati-sarkar* either in terms of individuals who survived as leaders or in terms of supplying the basic programme.

The first wave of activities, mass marches to *taluka* and other governmental centres, were not really *satyagrahas*. They were not basically non-violent efforts to put moral pressure on the enemy; their goal was, as an activist put it, 'to capture the centres of British power'.<sup>16</sup> People came armed with spears, axes, and other home-made weapons, and moved on government offices with some kind of idea that they could with their own hands put an end to the colonial power and take its place. There were four major marches between 24 August and 10 September at Karad (about 4000), Tasgaon (8000), Waduj (700) and Islampur (5000). But when firing killed nine at Waduj and two at Islampur, the illusion of capturing power died a natural death, and leaders began to feel the naivete of the programme: 'Our idea was to gather thousands, go to the *kacheri*, bring down the Union Jack and raise the national flag, put Gandhi topi on the *mamledar* and *faujdar*—and come home ! There was firing, and when we returned the old flags went back !'<sup>17</sup>

If frontal attack would not work, sabotage was clearly the next step. This had also begun quite early, with the cutting of wires and two train robberies in the district on 16 August and 10 September.<sup>18</sup> Now it became for some time the focus of the

movement and it was, like the mass actions, justified not simply in terms of pressure tactics or harassment of the government, but as a step toward the conquest of power: if the revolutionaries could not capture the centres of British power, they could break the contacts that bound these urban centres with the heart of India, the villages.<sup>19</sup> So numerous acts of sabotage, wire-cutting, the burning of Public Works Department bungalows in rural areas and other official buildings, the stealing of rifles from military police, and some armed encounters with the police took place. An important jailbreak was made from Yerawada on 1 November by Kisan Vir (of Wai in northern Satara) and Pandu Master (Pandurang Patil, of Yede Nipani in Valva *taluka*) who went on to become leaders of the movement. In Shiralapeth peasants began to seize forest land, and underground activists took up an earlier programme of demanding the resignation of police *patils*.

But this sabotage programme in turn led to a new crisis, and the response to it proved the turning point of the movement. The government came down with a heavy hand, collective fines were levied against villages and arrests left 2000 people of Satara in jail by the end of 1942. In spite of sabotage, it became clear that the English power remained strong. 'The English police and their agents, the establishment in the village (the *patils*, *watandars*, *sawkars*)' began to get bold. At first the people were on our side, but at the beginning of 1943 they were afraid, began to think that English power was not going to disappear, and so began to help the police in arresting us.<sup>20</sup>

The solution to this was that the state power had to be cut at the village level itself, by striking at the local 'agents' who were its linchpin. According to a Kundal leader, 'when we turned around, and instead of running away began to use weapons against those who were coming after us—that was the real beginning of the *prati sarkar*. A new type of freedom movement started.'<sup>21</sup> What happened was that the underground activists began to physically punish police informers (who were most frequently village level officials or some members of the *sawkar* elite). Activists of the Shirala group were the first to do this. On 25 November in a meeting at Shitur they set up what they called their 'state machinery', a very rudimentary division of labour with people allotted to 'police' and 'revenue' departments, and in November and December two acts of 'police administration' were taken with spontaneous but public 'courts' held by activists to punish informers.<sup>22</sup> The method that was used here came into vogue all over and was called *patra lavna*. *Patra* means horse-shoe and the term was used for shoeing a horse, but what was actually done was



to tie up the offender, and beat him thoroughly on the legs until he would be unable to walk for at least some days. From this the Satara *prati-sarkar* came to be known widely as *patri sarkar*, and at that time at least the activists did not mind the implications of violence for, they said, 'we wanted to strike terror into the minds of informers'.

In the Kundal area, such a process began in the first quarter of 1943, and with similar results: not only was the pressure from the police taken off, and the ebbing confidence of the people restored, but now the people began to come to the activists themselves to solve local social and economic problems. Thus, out of the acts of punishing informers for self-protection grew the *nyayadan mandals* that were to blossom into real 'peoples' courts', the central institution of the *prati sarkar*. And this happened, as G. D. Lad of Kundal stresses, not due to the conscious decisions of the leadership, but as a 'natural reaction of living people'.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless decisions had to be taken. In the formal sense, the founding of the *prati sarkar* occurred in the first half of 1943, in two major meetings of underground activists from different parts of Satara, at Kival (Karad *taluka*) in February and then Kameri (Valva *taluka*) on 3 June.

At Kival it was resolved to carry on the movement even though it was crushed at the all-India level, and to carry it forward to peoples' power by making a coordinated effort to set up *nyayadan mandals* in villages throughout the region. This ratified the process developing from below. It also involved the creation of a new ethic of struggle: the ideal freedom-fighter was no longer to be the courageous but non-violent *satyagrahi* but one who succeeded in remaining out of, or escaping from, British jails while carrying on the struggle. It was as if to say: 'On Gandhi's call we have taken a vow to "do or die", and we will carry it out regardless of what is happening elsewhere'.

At Kameri this decision was challenged by Y B. Chavan's group. Chavan, at that time the leading young Maratha within the Congress party, had already been arrested himself (according to many activists, he had effectively surrendered by giving the police a message as to where they could find him). In June his people argued that it was useless to carry on only at a local level, it would only increase repression on Satara peasants, and that even Achutrao Patwardhan, leader of the socialist underground in Bombay, had given the advice to surrender.

But few of the delegates were in any mood to take this advice. First, by this time, the establishment of the initial *nyayadan mandals* and the punishment of police informants had turned the

tempo of the movement in their favour. The underground activists were also beginning to confront the dacoits who were harassing the peasantry, and in several cases stolen goods were returned. The feeling of self-confidence among the activists was growing as they began to feel they were capable of protecting the 'life, honour and wealth' of the people from both dacoits and predators of the British bureaucracy, and the people in turn were putting their confidence in them as a centre of power.<sup>24</sup> Second, and perhaps more important, was the character of the activists themselves. They were almost entirely new people, without organizational links to the Congress hierarchy, and not deeply influenced by Gandhian ideology. The *bahujan samaj* group among them was imbued with an anti-Brahmanism that made them skeptical of the established leadership of the Congress and reluctant to follow the advice of even radical 'authorities'.

Thus at Kameri the meeting resolved once more to carry on the struggle (though a delegation was sent to Bombay to seek Patwardhan's approval, which was given). And so it was in the period February-June 1943, after the subsiding of the all-India movement, against the advice of the senior-most Maratha in the Congress district hierarchy, and on the basis of local self-determination and an ideology of 'peoples' power', that the Satara *prati sarkar* was consciously established.

#### ***Organization of the Prati Sarkar : June 1943 to March 1944***

The core of the *prati sarkar* lay in the one hundred or so (the number fluctuated and the personnel changed as some people were captured, or surrendered and new activists came in) underground activists—those who left their homes, moved from village to village serving as full-timers, carrying guns or other weapons, ready to confront the police if necessary, and carrying out 'constructive' as well as military and administrative tasks. They were organized into groups which were the effective decision-making centres for most activity. Representatives of all the groups met from time to time at the district level. They also maintained connections with socialist underground leaders in Bombay and this gave them their effective link with and sanction from the all-India Congress organization. At the village level, these activists moved to establish various structures that included volunteer squads (organized as the *Rashtra Seva Dal*, *Tufan Dals* etc.) and to some extent *panch* committees chosen or elected by the villagers themselves. This village structure will be discussed later, for it really developed only with the movement itself in late 1944 and 1945.

Who were the 'undergrounders'? Taking as a basis a list of names of 46 of the most prominent about whom full information is available, they represented most strongly the young and educated section of the *bahujan samaj* (see Table 3). It is true that Brahmans and merchants were somewhat over-represented in caste terms (but it should be remembered that most of the 'merchants' here were the southern Jains, who were linked with the non-Brahman movement through such leaders as Bhaurao Patil). In class terms, landlords and white-collar employees also figure quite prominently. Nevertheless, the representation of middle-caste peasants and workers is stronger here than in any other nationalist activity for which we have records. (It might be added that the 'Marathas' in this group included about half-and-half 'shahhanavkuli' aristocrats and ordinary Kunbi Marathas).

TABLE—3

*Activists of the Prati Sarkar*

Caste Category	Education (upto Class)			Profession*				
	0-3	above 4-7	7	Landlord- Merchant	Peasant	White Collar		
Brahman	0	5	2	4	1	3	0	
Merchant	0	5	0	2	2	1	0	
Maratha-Kunbi	1	17	5	2	14	2	5	
Balutedar	2	5	0	1	2	0	4	
Dalit	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	
Muslim	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	
Total	4	35	7	9	21	6	11	

Caste	Age in 1942			Previous Political History			Arrested in	Total
	Under 25	25-35	Above 35	Congress	Left	RSS or others	1942-43	
Brahman	2	4	1	2	1	2	2	7
Merchant	1	3	1	1	0	0	3	5
Maratha-Kunbi	10	12	1	2	0	0	8	23
Balutedar	3	4	0	1	0	0	2	7
Dalit	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Muslim	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	19	23	4	6	1	2	15	46

Merchant = Vani, Jain

Balutedar = Lohar, Sutar (artisan castes), and Ramoshi, Dhargar, etc.

Dalit = Mahar, Mang, Chambhar

\* There was one case of double profession.

*Dalits* and women were under-represented. Broadly, the *dalit* masses of the village were an important support base for the movement, but rarely produced activists. This was also true of women. Though the activists and their *nyayadan mandals* took a broadly progressive approach on the question of women and in their oppression, they had no programme of structurally involving women as activists or in decision-making positions, not even in the rather cooptive form that Gandhian organizations did. Thus although there was one woman (Rajamati Patel of Aitawade) who was an activist and a fighter, this was an individual accident and the other activists hardly knew what to do about her, particularly after independence had been won. Other woman activists who moved through the area to organize, such as Indumati Nikam of Indoli (Karad *taluka*) and Leelabai Patil of Yede Nipani (Valva) were partly linked to Gandhian structures and worked with the Rashtra Seva Dal in the later period.

The grouping of the activists emerged somewhat spontaneously. In the beginning, work in the district was said to be divided under some nine groups led by different people, but most of those listed rapidly became non-functioning, either because their leaders were convinced Gandhians who rejected violence (Swami Ramanand), because they were captured (Vasantrao Patil) or because they adopted a policy of surrender in early 1943 (Y. B. Chavan)<sup>25</sup>. By the time the *prati sarkar* was fully functioning, there were three main regional groups and some peripheral ones.

1. The Shiralapeth or western group functioned partly in the Krishna valley but mainly in the hilly areas and included Shiralapeth and the north-western part of Valva taluka. Its leadership was the most mixed in caste, and Gandhian at least to begin with. Its first leaders were Baburao Charankar, a Brahman of Charan, and Ganpatrao Patil, a Maratha of Bilashi, both old Gandhian Congressmen who had worked together since 1932, and Barde Guruji, a Jain school teacher from Wategaon (in the plains of Valva) who had also been a Congress activist from the 1930s. When the first two and their followers surrendered after Gandhi's advice and Barde Guruji was captured in 1944, Babuji Patankar, a young Maratha poor peasant of Kasegaon, took over and reorganized the group. Work at that time was extended into Patan *taluka* to the north of Shiralapeth, with the partnership of a local leader, Bewa Mavshikar.

2. The Kundal or eastern group was centred on the rich areas of Tasgaon *taluka* on the banks of Krishna and part of Valva, while it also included the drier eastern *taluka* of Khanapur and a small slice of Karad *taluka*. Kundal was its *rajdhani* (capital). More than any

other village in the district it was the centre of organized activities. The cousins G. D. Lad, Nathaji Lad and Appa Lad were the leaders of these activities in Kundal and they took Nana Patil as their figurehead and symbol. Naganath Naikaudi of Valva village was another leading activist who worked with this group, though at times he had his own agenda. The only woman fighter Rajamati Patil was also with this group. But apart from her all leading activists in this group were Marathas.

3. The Karad or central group was at first identified with Y. B. Chavan, but later came under the leadership of Madhav Jadhav (a young Maratha student of Karad who made a daring post-office robbery in the town in early 1943) and Dhanvantari (Laxmanrao Kulkarni, a Brahman of Kasegaon who had been associated briefly with the Rashtriya Svayamsewak Sangh). This was also in the central Krishna valley region.

It was in Karad, Patan, Valva, Khanapur, Tasgaon and Shiralapeth *talukas* that quite strongly functioning *nyayadan mandals* and associated volunteer and other village support structures were set up. Activity also went on in other parts of the district, in the northern areas of Wai *taluka* under Kisan Vir (a Shimpi activist), in Koregaon *taluka* under Pandurang Borate (a Maratha, and a textile mill worker who was one of many who returned to the district from Bombay at the outbreak of 1942). But these could not consolidate a real 'alternative government', and thus north of Karad the *prati sarkar* petered out into sabotage and sporadic individual activity, while south of Valva and Tasgaon it did not extend into the princely states of Sangli, Miraj and Kolhapur.

Representatives of the groups mentioned above met in district-wide meetings that took place about every six months and either made or ratified programmes for the whole *prati sarkar*. These also adopted from the beginning the practice from 'Congress tradition' of choosing an overall 'dictator' (Dhanvantari in February 1943, Kisan Vir in June 1943, Dhanvantari in September 1943, Kisan Vir again in March 1944). But the 'dictator' in fact had little actual authority, and notably was never chosen from either of the two most active (and extremely competitive) groups—Kundal and Shiralapeth. When the Kundal groups proposed Nana Patil's name as overall 'dictator', the Shiralapeth activists opposed him on the ground that he did not take part in direct action.

However, it was Nana Patil who remained the symbol of the entire *prati sarkar*. At the popular level it is represented by his name more than anything else. Yet he was its inspirer more than its actual leader. Nana Patil's own organizational links were with

the Kundal Group, which kept him hidden throughout the period. (Different reasons have been given for this: the necessity of not exposing a commander-in-chief to undue risk, or that health problems made it difficult for him to move around by this time.) But they did everything using his name, and in fact he had become so popular and widely known by the beginning of 1942 that it was easy for the smallest boy, if questioned by the police, to say 'Nana Patil told me to do this', 'Nana Patil gave me this weapon'. Thus, the Satara *prati sarkar* ended by being fully identified with his name.

The *prati sarkar's* relationship with the Bombay socialist leadership had a similar ambiguous character. It was a relationship in which it may be said the socialists provided legitimation and guidance, but no direction. Through this period, links were established, though there was no formal meeting of Satara representatives with the Bombay leadership between June 1943 and March 1944. In October 1943, the Socialists not knowing what was actually going on and beginning to hear from the conservative upper-class opponents of the Satara activists rumours about terrorism and violence in the form of *patra lavne*, sent a delegate, Nevalkar, to check on what was happening. He was shown around, had an exhausting and even thrilling experience fleeing the police, and gave the movement a clean cheque.<sup>26</sup> This helped to solidify some links, and after this Joshi Kaka, Dhanvantari and Nathaji Lad went to Bombay to open an office to organize support among Satara people in Bombay. This developed into the Satara Zilha Rashtriya Sangh, whose secretary Bapurao Jagtap, a Maratha textile worker later became a famous Communist activist. It was Socialist activists who provided links with the working class throughout this period, finding meeting places and arranging study groups for Satara underground activists who went to Bombay. The Satara 'undergrounders' also participated in some Bombay activity, including a bomb explosion in early 1944.<sup>27</sup>

Between June 1943 and early 1944 the movement whose pattern had been set by the end of 1942 began unfolding. There were almost no overall meetings, but a lot of local activities, which included *nyayadan mandals*, sabotage, which remained an ongoing programme throughout the period of the *prati sarkar* (2000 wires were cut all over the area, including Kolhapur, in a coordinated programme on 20 August), and continued efforts to gather weapons and ammunition. However a programme which occupied much of 1943 is the suppression of the dacoits infesting the area.

The fact that the *prati sarkar* established itself *against* the dacoits may come as a surprise to those (e.g. Harcourt)<sup>28</sup> who tend to see

them as 'social bandits' or a form of peasant rebels. The Satara movement was quite different from that in parts of northern India in 1942, where the attack on British power came from all sides, from 'criminal' lower classes (these were not necessarily bandits) as well as from peasants and students moved by the nationalist ideology. But this is the difference between a spontaneous outburst which can be simply negative—and being so, can fall apart easily under its internal contradictions—and the setting up of an alternative power structure, which has to have a clear identity and rules to function by. The *prati sarkar* could afford to recruit boys who might otherwise have joined bandit gangs, who would be daring if somewhat un-ideological fighters—but it could not afford to let dacoit gangs go on acting freely under the name of 'nationalism'. It was because the dacoits were a big power in the region that they had to be confronted.

The dacoits had become a power in the region for some of the same reasons that made the *prati sarkar* possible: they could take shelter in rugged mountainous terrain and take advantage of the many small princely states that made it complicated for police to pursue them. They sometimes ran courts of their own, and many even described them as the 'first *prati sarkar*'. And there was an aspect of 'social banditry' among them: most were poor, low caste boys (often Ramoshis) who went *farari* (underground) and took to crime because other opportunities were closed to them.

However, the dacoits preyed not only on the rich, but also on middle and poor peasants, shepherds and other isolated people, and sometimes worked in league with factions of the rural rich. Having 'peoples' courts' (or courts of their own) by itself meant little when the mores they enforced were—especially regarding women—little better than existing feudal practices. Finally, they frequently helped the British in giving information about the freedom-fighters. Thus, some of the underground activists at first argued that since the dacoits were already a significant anti-government force it would do 'no harm' to utilize their power. But the majority came to the conclusion that they were primarily unpopular criminals, and that no government was worth its name that could not protect its people from predators. Even in late 1942 the activists had begun to come into conflict with the dacoits, and throughout 1943 there was a series of armed encounters in which stolen goods were recovered, robberies and thefts punished. Most of these encounters took place in the Warna valley area with Babuji Patankar, Barde Guruji and the Shiralapeth group playing a leading role, but similar actions were reported from the area of the Kundal group as well. By the end of 1943, dacoit power was

finished in the region, and as one activist put it, 'the way was cleared for the *prati sarkar*'.<sup>29</sup>

In practice this meant that the way was clear for the 'peoples' courts', the *nyayadan mandals*, the core of an alternative government. These had a loose, informal structure, particularly at the beginning. They were not based on already existing caste or village panchayats, though this tradition was sometimes invoked and, later on, volunteer units and elected structures were set up to enforce and supplement their activities. At first, they functioned very simply: the underground activists would, after deciding to hear a case, come to the village, organize a meeting with the help of local respected leaders, hear the testimony of the people, and then, after consultation, give and implement a decision. This involved little formal democratic structure, but the substance of democracy was there in the fact that decisions were based on consultation and sometimes carried out before thousands of people.

There was a wide range of 'civil' and 'criminal' cases covered by the *mandals*. One activist provides a list which includes prohibition/drunkenness, dealing with village *goondas*, atrocities against women, and control of *sawkari*. We can classify the issues into social and economic categories.

The social cases included many issues affecting women—from prohibition and punishment of wife-beating (this was sometimes given the harshest punishment, *patra lavne*, including at least one case where the accused was a local-level activist)<sup>30</sup> to punishment of rape which was invariably dealt with very harshly. The thrust of such cases could go against people of all social classes, but it seemed to be especially, on the one hand, against the section known as 'village *goondas*'—low-caste 'lumpen' elements who sometimes served as gangmen of the rich—and, on the other hand, against the rich, in cases where harassment and sexual exploitation of the poor had been a part of the 'semi-feudal' exercise of village class power. A significant number of those punished for rape and exploitation of women seem to have been rich peasants, merchants, landlords and other such elements.

The direct economic thrust of the *nyayadan mandals* was ambiguous, for though it took up cases of moneylending, land disputes, etc. it did not directly challenge the position of moneylenders and landlords as a class. This was, at least for some, a conscious decision. As one activist put it, 'We did not touch property relations'.<sup>31</sup> As another noted, 'We told the *sawkars*—we are not opposed to your business, but exploitation and oppression are not good'.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, within this framework, the decisions



taken were clearly on the side of the poor or at least of the peasantry as a whole against moneylenders and landlords. 'Control of *sawkari*' and action against 'exploitation' meant in practice that very often widows or poor village craftsmen who had mortgaged one or two acres of land to the moneylenders would get it back: cases like this were reported from all over the *prati sarkar* area. The Kundal group made one famous attack on a very big Brahman moneylender, blackening his face and parading him on a donkey and tearing up his accounts.<sup>33</sup> After this, it was reported, moneylenders all over the area had humbled themselves and freed people from debt and the activists of this group argue that 'we didn't limit moneylending—we stopped it'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly there were at least a couple of cases reported of the land of absentee landlords being taken and given to the landless to till.<sup>35</sup>

Such cases—of land being given back to the poor, or given to the poor from the holdings of absentee landlords—with their anti-moneylender and anti-*zamindari* thrust, seem to have occurred really only towards the end of the period, 1945-46, and their extent is difficult to assess. It seems that the idea of 'land to the tiller' (but interpreted as giving absentee landlords' lands to the cultivating tenant, not to the landless) was in the air, but there is no record of a conscious, programmatic adoption of this by the *prati sarkar*. What can be said, however, is that the function of the *nyayadan mandals* was to constitute a power at the village level that was more on the side of the poor and toilers than any previous state power, and that the direction of the movement was towards an increasing concern with class issues.

#### *The Advance of the Prati Sarkar : March 1944 to January 1946*

In March 1944, two important meetings were held that led to deepening the structure and widening the area of activity of the *prati sarkar*. First, a meeting of 30-40 leading activists was held in Bombay with the Socialists, Achutrao Patwardhan, Nevalkar (who had been the delegate sent to Satara) and Tendulkar. This was prompted apparently both by some desire to regularize the work in Maharashtra as a whole and to help in taking some of the police pressure off the Satara people. At this meeting Achutrao proposed the name of Ratnappa Kumbhar of Kolhapur state as an overall 'dictator' for the Deccan states and Satara, but the Satara people rejected this: they considered the Kolhapur movement to be a 'doll's game' in comparison with theirs, and were not willing to be placed even formally under the authority of an 'outsider'.<sup>36</sup> However, they did not suggest an alternative overall 'dictator'. Instead, it was decided that the various groups should divide

responsibility for areas within the district and outside. The Kundal group was given responsibility for their part of Satara district and Khandesh, the Shiralapeth group for Sholapur district, and the Karad-central group for Pune district. Kisan Vir, of the northern area, and Joshi Kaka, an old Gandhian of Shiralapeth, were assigned to the Bombay office. Besides recognizing the autonomy of different groups functioning within Satara, this decision also resulted in sending some activists outside to stimulate movements elsewhere and reduce to some extent the police pressure on Satara.

Following this, on 20 March, about 90 activists met again, this time only as a Satara group meeting, at Mirurvyaciwadi, a village in Kolhapur state, just across the border from Satara. This time they resolved their differences sufficiently to choose Kisan Vir as 'dictator' (the primary debate was about Nana Patil, whom the Shirala group felt was too closely identified with the Kundal group). A fairly elaborate structure was set up. At the top was a Karyakari Mandal (called 'dictator board' in English) including eleven people: Dhanvantari, Kisan Vir, Babuji Patankar, Antukaka Barde (a relative of Barde Guruji from Wategaon), Buwa Mhavshikar, Sheikh Kaka (a young Muslim from Karad taluka who had run away from home with his father's army rifle at the age of fifteen and joined the Shirala group), Madhav Jadhav, S. P. Jadhav, Naganath Naikavdi, Nathaji Lad and Kisan Master (of Gohinde near Karad). This group, it may be noted, included seven Marathas, one Brahman, one Shimpi (tailor caste), one Muslim, and one Jain. Three supervisors were chosen, Pandu Master for the western area, G. D. Lad for the eastern area, and Pandurang Borate for the central-northern area. Within these regions, the entire area was divided into twenty districts, and the estimated 110 'underground activists' at the time were divided among them with 20 chosen *vibhag-nayaks* or leaders.<sup>37</sup>

Much of this elaborate structure may have been only a formality. But the programme given by the Karyakari Mandal, which was to form libraries, *nyayadan mandals* and Seva Dals in each village, was taken fairly seriously. The Seva Dals were formed first as local volunteer squads to aid the 'undergrounders', and second as units of the Rashtra Seva Dal which functioned as open organizations with no official connection with the 'undergrounders': anyone who actively joined underground work was to give a formal resignation. They also served as the main units to carry on various aspects of the 'constructive' programme of the *prati sarkar*—*sahbhajans* and other anti-untouchability work, collective and inexpensive 'Gandhi weddings' (without bands, and

with wedding accoutrements that generally included a picture of Gandhi or the national flag, instead of gods), road construction, 'village cleaning'.

While these Dals were being set up, the dispersion of some Satara activists to underground work in other districts had one very spectacular effect: on 14 April, some five lakh rupees of Government money was robbed from a bus near Chimthana in Dhule district—the Khandesh treasury robbery. This was carried out by a group of eight activists, including G.D. Lad and Naganath Naikaudi of the Kundal group and local Khandesh nationalists led by Uttamrao Patil. After a two-hour gunbattle with the police who were caught unawares, the attackers managed to escape with most of the money and only slight injury. Of this amount, roughly Rs. 125,000 was given to the 'national movement' (the Bombay centre?), Rs. 100,000 was left with the Khandesh group, and the remainder, approximately Rs. 250,000, was left in the hands of the Kundal group.

The Kundal group apparently kept this money and did not distribute it among the rest of the Satara groups. From this period somewhat different ways of building up village-level structures emerged among the different groups, though these were more fully implemented only from the end of 1944 and 1945. The Shiralapeth and Karad groups concentrated more on building up Rashtra Seva Dals as local units, and in the process kept their contacts with the Socialists and at least a section of Gandhians. The Kundal group worked independently—as indeed they had been doing in many ways from the beginning—and began to build up what they called their Tufan Sena.<sup>38</sup> The money from the Khandesh treasury robbery provided funds for uniforms and organizing a training course. Village units were opened up, called Tufan Dals, and one or two 'captains' from every village were gathered for two to three month training courses held in the Vyayamshala at Kundal. These began to be held in 1945, and it was claimed there were 200-400 trainees at each course. Members of the Tufan Dals, like those of the Rashtra Seva Dals, did not themselves carry arms (only the actual 'undergrounders' did) and their work was similarly that of supporting and implementing underground activity and *nyayadan mandal* decisions, and carrying out village constructive work. But the Kundal group developed, with the Tufan Sena, a more militaristic image and militaristic culture than in the other areas.

Apparently only Naganath Naikaudi of Valva, working independently within the Kundal group, concerned himself with a real programme of increasing military strength after 1944. His sub-

group's approach was that all was useless without building up a real 'army', and he first used some of the Khandesh money in purchasing arms in Goa, and then went to Delhi on a private trip to seek contact with the Azad Hind Sena so that real military training could be given to volunteers. He had a bad experience with Maniben Patel, whom he met in the Congress office set up for the support of the first three Indian National Army men on trial, but contacted two Sikh army youths in the office who later agreed to come to Satara and give training. This led to a training camp being set up in the Sahyadri hills at the end of 1945.<sup>39</sup>

But while all these developments had their 'beginnings' in early 1944, they were interrupted in the middle of the year by a major crisis: Gandhi's call to surrender. Growing rifts between Socialists and Gandhians within the Congress organization had culminated in a split in the underground Bombay 'Central Directorate' in September 1943. On Gandhi's release from jail in May 1944, he apparently took an attitude of disowning the more violent underground activities—which left the socialist leadership feeling disillusioned and adrift<sup>40</sup>—and on 1 August gave an open call for all those still underground to cease struggle and surrender. And all over the country, nationalists ranging from the disappointed socialist leadership to the loyal Congressmen who had set up the only other parallel government in the country in Medinipur, followed Gandhi's advice—except in Satara.

The underground activists met Achutrao Patwardhan again in Bombay. Reportedly three to four hundred were present, and there was an intense debate. The Gandhian loyalists of Bilashi and Charan of the Shiralapeth group were the only ones who were ready, even reluctantly, to follow the Mahatma's call. The rest opposed it from the adamantly independent Kundal group to the main section of the Shiralapeth and Karad groups, who argued in the words of Dhanvantari, 'What Gandhi says is OK, but as long as the opposition has arms we will not throw down our arms. The question of surrender doesn't come in'.<sup>41</sup> The only decision that could be taken was to give those who wanted to follow Gandhi's advice the freedom to do so! And so Baburao Charankar and Ganpatrao Patil of the Shirala group, with about 60 of their youthful followers, surrendered. Notably this was the only section of the then existing *prati sarkar* that had developed ties with the Congress party hierarchy prior to 1942 (they also had no real background in the non-Brahman movement). For the 'new wave' of activists who had built the *prati sarkar*, Gandhi's slogan 'do or die' took precedence over his later expressed wishes, though they were helped in their decision by at least some knowledge of

divisions within the Congress, and the news that people like Nehru were coming out in praise of the struggle and saying 'Jai Satara'.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, police repression made little difference to the movement. It is noteworthy that in June 1944 when new ransoms were declared by the government, a total of Rs.52,000 was offered for Satara activists, with Rs.5,000 (the same amount offered for the arrest of Achutrao Patwardhan) put on the heads of four activists, Barde Guruji, Baburao Charankar, Nana Patil and Nathaji Lad.<sup>43</sup> The call of the Congress high command to lay down arms was equally ineffective. What these different efforts produced was the sporadic loss of some leaders—Baburao Charankar (surrendered September 1944), Barde Guruji (arrested October 1944), Madhavrao Jadhav (arrested August 1945) and finally Dhanvantari (arrested September 1945). But there seemed to be sufficient new men to replace them, and enough original leaders evading arrest to provide continuity. The activities of the *prati sarkar* — local *nyayadan mandal* work, punishment of criminals, and sporadic bank and post office robberies—continued unabated.

Indeed, it can be said that they intensified after mid-1944. The end of 1944, as noted above, was the period when the Kundal group really moved to set up its Tufan Sena units and training courses. The other groups organized an intensive Rashtra Seva Dal programme beginning at the end of 1944. This meant increasingly open meetings. The first of these was a series of nearly 150 meetings held by Pandu Master, throughout the whole Satara region and in Kolhapur with the theme of 'establishing Gram Raj, fighting the British, defending the village' Then, from late December 1944 to February 1945, a programme of Rashtra Seva Dal *shibirs* (camps) with Swami Ramananda Bharati, the Seva Dal leader, was organized. This began with a ten-day *shibir* at Wategaon; and the *shibir* went on in spite of the fact that the police arrested the leaders, beat the boys and destroyed the food. Later on, the Swami, released from jail for health reasons on 6 January 1945, undertook another tour of the district during which he addressed 108 meetings in three months. This was in defiance of an official ban on meetings and speeches. Often underground activists helped in organizing these programmes and made brief appearances in the *shibirs* and meetings, despite constant police pressure and attacks. There was a kind of alliance between the underground activists and the Gandhians—and in fact Ramananda Swami used the occasion to preach against violence.<sup>44</sup>

On 3 March 1945 at Surgundacyawadi, a meeting of the Satara activists was held which adopted a constitution for the *prati sarkar*.<sup>45</sup> This was from a *Ramrajya* constitution that had been

drawn up for the nationalist ruler of Aundh state and was actually rather vague. It provided for the election of village committees of 5 to 7 members to handle the 'court' cases; above them were group committees elected from the chairmen of the village committees as well as (appointed) supervisors of the constituent 7 to 13 villages to handle appeals; and at the apex a 'central committee' to handle final appeals. Little was said in this about the type of laws to be enforced. The 'under grounders' themselves functioned as the final court of appeal or 'central committee'.

As to the extent of all this activity at the village level, there are a few statistical details available. Gokhale gives a list of 95 villages which had *nyayadan mandals*, 130 which had Seva Dals, and 100 with libraries (many of these were overlapping), all of which were in Karad, Shirala, Valva, Patan *talukas*—that is the area in which the Shirala and Karad groups were working.<sup>46</sup> Appasaheb Lad gives a figure of 6250 petitions and 4040 decisions made in cases brought to *nyayadan mandals* in the *talukas* of Khanapur, Tasgaon, Valva and Karad, the areas in which the Kundal group was working.<sup>47</sup> It was also said that 260 Tufan Sena captains were trained at Kundal and up to 5000 Tufan Sainiks were created in the district.<sup>48</sup> Their main activity was to supervise and help the village activities of the *panchayat/nyayadan mandal* (including keeping diaries and reporting to higher committees), but they also served as a volunteer force; and one important event reported was that 250 captains went with G. D. Lad—the Tufan Sena 'field marshall' and overseer of all this activity—to Marathwada to train local youths and build a force to help people protect themselves from the Razakars.<sup>49</sup> (It is striking that there was no contact at this time of the Satara national revolutionaries with the Telengana revolt, which was just beginning, for the Satara activists only had organizational contact with the Congress hierarchy or with the Socialists inside the Congress.)

The main achievements claimed for the *prati sarkar* in all these areas were much the same: prohibition achieved in many villages; the ending of thefts, robberies, 'village *goondaism*' and dacoity; the stopping of atrocities on women; the spread of education, cleaning of villages and building of roads, inexpensive weddings, bringing together caste Hindus and untouchables.<sup>50</sup> A small movement was made in the direction of organizing women with the formation of women's Rashtra Seva Dals in some big villages of Karad and Valva *talukas*, and in May 1945 a three-week Seva Dal *shibir* was held for women at Kasegaon with 45 women and 25 children present.<sup>51</sup> Little is said, in the more official statistics provided by activists, of movements in the direction of

ending *sawkari* or ending *zamindari*—though these seemed to be ideas that were gaining ground at least among some of the activists at the time. There were certainly pressures in this direction from the masses of peasants.

What should be remembered is that by this time—the middle of 1945—the question before the *prati sarkar* activists was not simply one of moving forward, but of defending their own achievements—before the Congress and the mass of the Indian people. The Congress was badly divided at this time about the 1942 upsurge itself. As far as Satara was concerned, the Brahman landlords and *sawkars* and the Marwari merchants had the ear of the local party hierarchy, as well as of influential people on the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee like Shankarrao Deo, in defining *prati sarkar* activities as criminal. The Satara people would have liked Congress help in the reduction of police pressure, getting warrants against activists removed, and publicity about police atrocities—but it seems that by this time to even refer to the Satara *prati sarkar* in public meetings elsewhere in Maharashtra was the mark of a radical or a socialist.<sup>52</sup> Some of this tension apparently came out at the time of Achutrao Patwardhan's first visit to the district, when a meeting was held at Kundal. Activists met Achutrao who reportedly advised the Tufan Sena and Seva Dal to merge. Later, about 78 activists, the core group of all areas, met Achutrao, Raosaheb Patwardhan and Shankarrao Deo together.<sup>53</sup>

It is unclear what came out of this meeting, but the Congress itself was moving in the direction of focusing all its energies on the 1946 elections. This can be seen not only as a British strategy to divert Congress-nationalist activities from mass confrontations,<sup>54</sup> but also as a useful way for the Congress conservatives to reassert their control. It was the elections which effectively ended the *prati sarkar*, not British military force. A huge peasant conference arranged by the activists at Yelgaon in Karad *taluka*—Sheikh Kaka's village, where he had marked the beginning of the movement by robbing government grain stores and distributing the grain—served as the beginning of election propaganda. Underground activists came out to throw themselves into this activity. There was a division over candidates—a left candidate, V. N. Patil, a lawyer who later became a Communist, and the right Congress candidate, Balasaheb Desai, who later became a Congress member of the state Legislative Assembly and a minister. Desai was backed by Y.B. Chavan, who began to come forward from that time as the Maratha Congress loyalist, appealing to all the 'undergrounders' and clever enough to divert

Left loyalties. But for the majority of underground activists—even more so, for the masses of peasants and other working people behind them—the issues were not very clearly drawn. In a May 1946 speech marking his emergence from hiding, Nana Patil warned, ‘The issue before the activists is whether in the drowning of imperialism a capitalist state or a peasants’ and workers’ state will be established. Since Mahatmaji has approved the principle of “land to the tiller” the work of establishing a base for a peasant-worker state has definitely been taken up; but this is not all that simple’.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed it was not. The right-wing candidate won in Satara, and once the elections were over, people found that they had elected not simply a nationalist government but one dominated by the most conservative elements in Congress, which produced the Kher ministry and brought long-time opponents of the Maharashtrian *bahujan samaj* like Morarji Desai into key ministerial positions. And the last battle of the *prati sarkar*—when police surrounded a training camp at Mandur in the Sahyadris and killed one of the Sikh trainers and one local peasant boy in a shoot-out on February 26, 1946, exactly seven days after the naval mutiny in Bombay—went practically unnoticed in the context of the new tensions that were sweeping India at the time.

### *Class Meaning of the Prati Sarkar*

The Satara *prati sarkar* was the most deeply based and long-lasting of the national revolts that took place in 1942, and its achievement was all the more remarkable because it lacked the direction of any national political force. To return to the questions this essay began with, let us conclude with some remarks about why this uprising could take place in Satara in particular, and what its result was.

Two basic reasons probably made it possible for Satara district to be the scene of a real parallel government. The first was geo-political: the rugged hills of the Sahyadris provided refuge to guerrilla fighters as well as dacoits, and the existence of a number of princely states and their territories helped to provide political refuge and aid. The second reason was social: it was, in a way, the non-Brahman Satyashodhak movement which gave birth to the *prati sarkar*—by fostering education, a sense of unity among the various middle and low-castes in an anti-feudal struggle, a drive for modernization and rationality, a sense of self-confidence and revolt among a peasantry which already had a fighting tradition dating back for centuries. The Satyashodhak movement which had one of its strongest centres in the district built on unprecedented degree of solidarity and social consciousness, and by the 1930s,



when the original anti-nationalism of the early non-Brahman leaders was replaced by nationalism, the way was open for this popular solidarity and consciousness to express itself in a fight against colonial injustice.

The significance of the *prati sarkar* was that it was a major episode in the long anti-feudal, anti-caste and anti-imperialist struggles of the southern Maharashtrian peasantry. Yet in the end, because no revolutionary Left leadership could develop to lead this movement forward in an anti-capitalist direction and really establish its base among the oppressed poor peasantry and agricultural labourers, it functioned simply as a crucial step in consolidating the power of a capitalist farmer class in southern Maharashtra.

In class terms, the *prati sarkar* was a movement of the *bahujan samaj*, which in Satara district more than elsewhere represented a broad and relatively unified peasant-artisan-labourer section. The term *bahujan samaj*, which became popular within the non-Brahman movement after 1900, aimed at contrasting the non-Brahmans with the *shetji-bhatji* oppressors, and included all middle caste sections, from Maratha-Kunbis to Telis, Nhavis, Ramoshis, Sutara, etc., down to the Mahar-Mang untouchables. (The *dalits*, were both a part and not a part of the non-Brahman movement and the *prati sarkar* itself—but it is significant that though their movement developed as a separate force under Dr. Ambedkar, it always maintained a policy of alliance with non-Brahmans). In class terms it included a large cross-section from big tenants, rich peasants and the educated middle class down to poor peasants and labourers. Thus it represented, in the context of Maharashtra, those sections who had a unity of interest in the anti-feudal struggle. And it was this *bahujan samaj*, along with a few representatives of Brahman and landlord-merchant families, that constituted the main force of activists in the 1942 revolt.

However, it was only a section of the *bahujan samaj* which came into power after independence. Today the term is no longer used in the same broad sense. A Matang agricultural labourer leader can now say, 'The *bahujan samaj* is only 20% of the village—we are 80%', which means that the term today has really come to represent only the top Maratha rich farmers—not even all Marathas. The 1942 movement took place at a time when a section of the broad peasant mass was on the way to consolidating itself as a rich peasantry and eventually to becoming capitalist farmers. Almost all the main activists of the movement (whether or not they came originally from poor peasant or low-caste families or

ordinary Patil or Kunbi families) were themselves, by virtue of their education, on the way to becoming members of this class if they were not already part of it. And, again, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, this section has successfully consolidated its position as a capitalist farmer class.

The *prati sarkar* itself was primarily an anti-imperialist upsurge, one of the most militant in India. As we have noted, the *nyayadan mandals* 'did not touch property relations as such'. The activists opposed the village *patils* and *talathis* (record-keepers) who were the lowest level of government servants, but they did not attack merchants or landlords (Brahman or Maratha) as a class, who remained neutral with a few giving indirect support, if only because they could recognize the coming power of the nationalists. Further, 'progressive' ruling princes like Appa Pant of Aundh state and 'national' capitalists like Kirloskar maintained good relations with the movement's leaders. (It may be added that the Kirloskars, a kind of classic national bourgeoisie whose capital accumulation was linked to agricultural improvements, throughout maintained good relations with the non-Brahman movement).

Yet at the village level, the base of the *prati sarkar* was not among the rich but among the middle and poor peasants, and the power of the *nyayadan mandals* was used to check the moneylenders' power to exploit. More important than this, the *prati sarkar* was one episode in a much longer process of mass upsurge, which included the whole history of the non-Brahman revolt. It is not accidental that the 1920-21 peasant revolts took place in the very same *talukas* which were the centre of the *prati sarkar*, or that it was followed soon afterwards by the widespread burning of Brahman landlord homes after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. The latter was a kind of anti-feudal upsurge, and though the violence was condemned by freedom fighters, it is a fact that at least some people connected with the *prati sarkar* movement participated in the attacks and in the distribution of grain and other property to the poor. This driving away of Brahman landlords, and the Tenancy Acts which followed, resulted in a significant dispossession of the former feudal classes (both Brahmans and Marathas). For these reasons, the thrust of mass political and social action in Satara can be described as anti-colonial and anti-feudal, with varying expressions in varying periods.

Yet an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle can lead to a new bourgeois domination, if it is not carried forward under working class leadership. The bourgeoisie can lead such struggles (in reformist, half-hearted ways) or it can take advantage of such

struggles even when they are led by more militant (e.g. petty bourgeois) leadership. This is basically what happened with the *prati sarkar*. The destruction of British rule in India brought the Indian bourgeoisie to power at the centre, and the militancy of national struggle in the Satara-Sangli region brought a new capitalist farmer class to power (from below, not from above as in the Prussian path which is normally taken to apply to India). The struggles against Brahman landlords and the Tenancy Acts destroyed the former feudal class, but they did not in the end benefit the peasantry as a whole (though they confused the Left, which tended to see landlord abolition as the realization of 'land to the tiller'). They simply changed the form of exploitation of the toiling majority, who are today agricultural labourers and poor peasants.

The capitalist farmer class has taken shape in the Satara-Sangli region as a result of the *prati sarkar* and the non-Brahman movement. It would be an exaggeration to say that there are no Brahman big farmers or feudal Marathas left in the area; in fact there are many. But the dominant section of today's big farmer class are those who were previously ordinary ryots, tenant cultivators, junior members of *patil* lineages, Marathas of sometimes questionable status, and a fair sprinkling of non-Marathas, i.e. the *bahujan samaj* of the 1930s. This *bahujan samaj*, or rather its rich section, moved into power with only minimal strikes against the former Maratha feudal lords (with whom it had few essential quarrels), with only a few blows against the merchants (with whom it could come to adjustment once it consolidated control of land and other instruments of power), and with some severe kicks against Brahman landlords. In short, it attacked feudalism in a reformist rather than a radical way. Nevertheless, it represented a new class moving into power. Today tenancy is minimal (and the rich farmers are as likely to lease in land as to let it out); wage labour is predominant; family heritage remains important but can easily be overridden in a child's marriage (at least within the boundaries of the caste) for education, money and political connections.

The Satara-Sangli capitalist farmers are quite a sophisticated ruling class today. They are able to claim deep roots among the masses by claiming leadership of historical struggles, and they have a fairly wide base in caste terms and a flexibility in co-opting and allying with rising members of minority castes and *dalits*. Their accumulation of capital and power is based on wage labour as well as on such progressive and modern institutions as co-operative sugar factories, education societies, dairy and credit co-operatives, and banks. But the benignness of their rule should not be

over-estimated. The prohibition campaigns, people's courts and punishment of village *goondas* in the *prati sarkar* might never have taken place. Today *goondaism*, rapes and other atrocities against women, corruption, alcoholism and suppression of the village poor, all continue to exist. They are, perhaps, a by-product of rich farmer rule in the same way that alcohol is a by-product of the sugar factories.

Thus the new rural and urban ruling classes have appropriated the gains of the *prati sarkar*. But the issue is not settled yet. For while the capitalist farmers of the region have come out of this tradition of nationalist and anti-feudal struggles, so also have the toiling masses. Democratic traditions and a history of struggle have left their mark on them too. The *prati sarkar* is their heritage, even more than it is the heritage of the élite. Perhaps it is not accidental that for nearly 30 years the history of the *prati sarkar* and its heroic anti-imperialist fight has been relatively ignored, distorted and even suppressed by the new class that has come to power. Today, as the toiling people of southern Maharashtra—workers, agricultural labourers, poor peasants, *dalits*, women—are again rising to fight for social justice and equality, their traditions are again being brought forward. As striking textile worker activists from the region warned Vasantdada Patil, Chief Minister of the state, in 1984 :

The callouses on Vasantdada's hands have disappeared. Fat has grown around the bullet lodged in his chest. Now he has become the representative of the capitalist class—not only that, he himself is a sugar baron. So we want to warn Vasantdada that just as he took a gun in his hand, at a time when he fought as a part of the oppressed masses, and fired bullets against the British, so the textile workers and other toilers today have the capacity to fire guns against the capitalist class and the government and to build up a new *prati sarkar*.

### Notes

1. Reported by Nathaji Lad, in Jaysingh Rao Pawar, (ed.), *Krantisinh Nana Patil* (Arundhati Prakashan, Kolhapur, 1983), p.258.
2. A map of the depth and extent of disturbances is given in Max Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India : The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces' in D.A. Low, (ed.) *Congress and the Raj* (Colombia, 1977), p.317.
3. English works include Harcourt, *op. cit.* ; Francis Hutchins, *The Spontaneous Revolution, The Quit India Movement* (New Delhi, 1971) ; Arun Chandra

Bhuyan, *The Quit India Movement : The Second World War and Indian Nationalism* (Delhi, 1987).

Most such material is based on police records, which are often inadequate, especially in the case of underground revolutionaries whose very purpose was to carry on their activities without being known or caught by the police. An additional factor (at least in the case of Maharashtra) appears to be the reluctance of Congress powerholders to bring up the issue of who were the real participants. A more or less 'official' source book—B.G. Kunte, (ed.) *Congress Activities, 1942-46: Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement, Vol. IV* (Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1977)—is remarkable for the fact that it almost totally ignores the *prati sarkar*. A book in preparation by Prof. A. Shinde, also based on police records, will apparently be more thorough but also has been criticized by freedom fighters for ignoring non-recorded events—and will apparently slide over some sensitive issues such as the role of Y.B. Chavan ! The Marathi material now coming out will remedy most of these deficiencies. These include Pawar, *op.cit.* ; *Kranti Agrani G. D. Babu Lad Smarnika* (Kundal, 1983) ; Viplavi Chamundrao (a pseudonym), *Swatantryacya Himachalawar Mavalele Don Divya Vare* (Kirloskar Press, Pune, 1971), Dattatray Balwant Lohar, *Swatantryaca Sangram 1930 to 1948* (Sagam Press, Sangli, 1982) ; Dhanvantari, 'Kundalce Krantivir G. D. Babu', *Rash-trashakti*, (10 Jan. 1983) ; Muktabai Sathe, 'Bilaschicya Harijan (Mang) Strici Atmakatha' (unpublished manuscript). Finally Baburao Gokhale. *Jagrut Satara* (Second Edition) has a very thorough account.

In addition to these, my sources included interviews with : Bhagwanrao (Bappa) Patil (Hanmant Wadiye), Baburao Gokhale (Karad), Dhanvantari (Laxmanrao Kulkarni, Kasegaon), Indutai Patankar (Kasegaon), Abba Gawade (Kasegaon), Barde Guruji (Wategaon), D.G. Deshpande (Islam-pur), Namdevrao Karadkar (Sangli), Naganath Naikaude (Walwa), G. D. Bapusaheb Lad (Kundal), Pandurang Borate (Kumta Koregaon), Muktabai Sathe (Bilashi), and Rajamati Patil-Birnale (Anakalkhop). Some family records including two letters from Y.B. Chavan to Babuji Patankar (6-2-46 and 8-2-46), an open letter from N.G. Gore to the Satara activists (13-5-46) and other socialist party correspondence and leaflets dating from 1948-51 have also been used.

4. *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. XI : Satara* (Government Central Press, Bombay, 1885), p.347.
5. Walter Hamilton, *The East-India Gazetteer, Vol. II* (London, 1928 ; First published 1825), p.170.
6. *Satara Gazetter*, pp. 480-81.
7. Frank Perlin, "Interior" and "Exterior" in Rural Formations: Difference as Relation in the countryside of the Late Medieval Deccan', Paper presented at Peasants Seminar, School of Oriental & African Studies, London, 4 March 1977 (subsequently published in *Journal of Peasant Studies*).
8. Cited in Gail Omvedt. *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society : The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1910-1930* (Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Pune, 1976), p. 90.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.
10. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 218.
11. Uttamrao Patil and Appasaheb Lad, *Krantivir Nana Patil* (Usha Prakashan, Aundh, 1947), p.24. (Tr. mine).
12. Patil and Lad, in Pawar, *op.cit.*, pp. 396-7.
13. Harcourt, *op.cit.*, p. 34. Hutchins, *op.cit.*, stresses Gandhi's role as inspirer and instigator.
14. In Pawar, *op. cit.*, p. 310
15. Gokhale, *op. cit.*

16. D. G. Despande, interview.
17. G. D. Lad, interview.
18. The line from Bombay to Bangalore runs through the heart of the district.
19. D. G. Despande, interview.
20. G.D. Lad, interview.
21. Ibid.
22. Lohar, *op. cit.*, p.31. According to G. D. Lad, the *patra lawna* punishment was first used by British police.
23. G.D. Lad, interview.
24. Lohar, *op. cit.*, p. 31 ; Gokhale,*op.cit.*
25. See the list in Gokhale, *op. cit.*, or of G. S. Altekar in Pawar, *op. cit.*, p.94.
26. Dhanvantari, interview; Gokhale, *op. cit.*
27. Bhagwanrao Patil, interview; Gokhale *op. cit.*
28. Harcourt, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-8.
29. D.G. Despande, interview.
30. This was reported from Malkhed, a village I studied in 1980 in the course of an I.L.O. sponsored study of the 'Effects of Agricultural Development of the Status of Women'.
31. D.G. Deshpande, interview.
32. Dhanvantari, interview.
33. Bhagwanrao Patil, in Pawar, *op. cit.*, p.326.
34. *Loc cit.*, and G.D. Lad, interview.
35. Bhagwanrao Patil, interview.
36. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, Barde Guruji, interview.
37. Gokhale, *op. cit.*,
38. Bhagwanrao Patil, interview, confirms the name came from 'Hitler's Storm Troopers'.
39. Viplavi Chamundrao, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-20.
40. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-42.
41. Dhanvantari, interview.
42. Ibid.
43. Lohar, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59 ; Gokhale, *op. cit.*
44. Ibid.
45. This is published in Appasaheb Lad, in Pawar, *op. cit.*, pp.318-21 ; and in Gokhale, *op. cit.*
46. Ibid.
47. Appasaheb Lad, in Pawar, *op. cit.*, p. 317.
48. Gokhale, *op. cit.*
49. Patil, in Pawar, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
50. Gokhale, *op. cit.* ; Lad, in Pawar, *op. cit.*, p.316. Numerous other sources, speeches etc. give nearly the same kind of list.
51. Muktabai Sathe, interview ; Indumati Patankar, interview ; Gokhale, *op. cit.*
52. See Kunte, *op. cit.* for examples.
53. Gokhale, *op. cit.*
54. Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17, 14-16 (Annual Number 1982). This is an important overview of class conflict and the potentialities of revolt in this period.



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